SOCIOECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND THE REDEMPTIVE HOPE OF NATURE IN 
JOHN STEINBECK’S THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

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May 1992

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October 1994

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree 
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH 
at the 
CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY 
MAY 2015
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for the Department of
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Student’s Date of Defense: April 22, 2015
DEDICATION

To My Sister and Friend Lisa
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Cleveland State University: Professor Adam Sonstegard, Thesis Chairperson; Professor Julie Burrell and Professor James Marino, Thesis Committee Members; Administrator Jane Dugan; and Staff of Michael Schwartz Library.

I thank my family: mother Hélène, father Marko, sister Lisa, and my noble cats.
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ABSTRACT

Ethan Allen Hawley receives the gift of redemption throughout John Steinbeck’s The Winter of Our Discontent (1961). Many forms of redemption occur throughout the novel, but Steinbeck does not blatantly present all of them. Raymond L. Griffith’s 1972 dissertation uses the term “duality” to discuss, as stated, the “validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection” contained in Steinbeck’s works. My thesis specifically uses the term duality to explicate the various “hardship versus redemption” dualities that exist in Winter. Ethan lives a life of duality throughout the majority of the novel. Ethan’s dual lives involve his behavior and rationale while in nature settings and his behavior and rationale while in socioeconomic settings. Ethan experiences this duality but never acknowledges this duality of place. Other “hardship versus redemption” dualities exist in the novel, such as Ethan receiving his grandfather’s and aunt’s teachings and then Ethan teaching his own children; Ethan’s brotherly encounters; Steinbeck’s inclusion of Christian ideas; and Steinbeck’s correlation to and also divergence from William Shakespeare’s The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. Ethan’s duality of place finally unites at the novel’s conclusion. Ethan’s secret Place in nature induces a confrontation with reality and a humanistic response to socioeconomic hardship. Steinbeck concludes the novel with the subtle assertion of the redemptive hope of nature to induce strength.
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“Come forth into the light of things, / Let Nature be your Teacher” (Wordsworth 107).

Ethan Allen Hawley receives the gift of redemption throughout John Steinbeck’s novel *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961). Many forms of redemption occur throughout the novel, but Steinbeck does not blatantly present all of them. Ethan’s hardships and his dismal view of various experiences are countered by his chances at redemption that Steinbeck subtly presents throughout the novel. Steinbeck states the following, published in *The Paris Review*: “It is the fashion now in writing to have every man defeated and destroyed. And I do not believe all men are destroyed” (Benchley 172). Ethan Allen Hawley exemplifies this belief because Steinbeck does not destroy Ethan in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Instead, Steinbeck gives Ethan chances to seek redemption. In the novel’s last chapter, Steinbeck’s ultimate gift of redemption to Ethan is powerful and inspiring; Ethan indeed finds redemption while in nature. Glimmers of redemptive hope, though, appear throughout the novel, not just the novel’s conclusion.
The “hardship versus redemption” aspect of the novel creates a duality. Ethan lives a life of duality throughout the majority of Steinbeck’s *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Ethan’s dual lives involve his behavior and rationale while he is in nature settings and his behavior and rationale while he is in socioeconomic settings; Ethan’s conduct while in a natural setting is in severe contrast to his conduct while in a socioeconomic setting. Ethan experiences this duality of place but never acknowledges it. At the novel’s conclusion, Ethan’s duality of place finally unites within himself because his thoughts while in the Place are resolutions or plans regarding how he is to proceed when he reenters his socioeconomic world. But Steinbeck presents subtle examples of Ethan’s natural world and his socioeconomic world momentarily uniting and relating throughout the novel.

Other “hardship versus redemption” dualities exist in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, which are explicated in this paper. They occur in the following areas of the novel: Ethan receiving his grandfather’s and aunt’s teachings and then Ethan teaching his own children; Ethan’s brotherly encounters with Danny Taylor, Richard Walder, and Mr. Baker, whom Ethan signifies as “Mr. Banker Baker” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 48); Steinbeck’s inclusion of Christian ideas; and Steinbeck’s correlation to and also divergence from William Shakespeare’s play *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. Steinbeck’s novel contains many correlations to Shakespeare’s play, which are analyzed periodically in this paper.

Raymond L. Griffith asserts that Steinbeck’s literary works contain duality. Specifically, in the Abstract of the dissertation “Dissonant Symphony: Multilevel Duality in the Fiction of John Steinbeck” (1972), Griffith writes the following: “This duality is
the key to the appreciation of Steinbeck’s technique … utilizing counterpoint and clashing themes.” Furthermore, Griffith’s thesis statement in the Abstract is the following: “The two themes that dominate Steinbeck’s fiction concern the validity of perfection and the impossibility of perfection.” Griffith, though, does not assess strength in Steinbeck’s “later novels” by stating, “Subsurface layers of unresolved duality contradict the shallow thematic synthesis.” To add to Griffith’s assessment of Steinbeck’s use of duality, this paper focuses on Steinbeck’s specific duality of hardship and then the redemptive chance to overcome hardship in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Steinbeck structures this novel with many examples of this type of duality.

Ethan’s experiences in nature occur in his secret Place by the sea, walking to work and walking to the Place, on the beach with Mary, and near Danny’s shack. Ethan’s experiences in his socioeconomic world involve the grocery store, his house, Margie’s house, the Bakers’ house, the bank, and other manmade constructs. Furthermore, in this paper, the term “pedagogy” refers to the wise, moral, and patient teachings shared among individuals, while the term “confrontation” is used in this paper to refer to the acknowledgement and acceptance of truth/reality without denial. The term “redemption” in this paper is referenced using two definitions of “redeem”: “to make good” and “to atone for” (*Webster’s* 986). In this paper, redemption also means the chance to enact noble responsibility and compassion toward others. In this paper, the “hardship versus redemption” duality is a contrast between Ethan’s experiences in socioeconomic situations that are predominantly difficult and Ethan’s experiences in nature settings that are continuously helpful and ennobling.
In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan gains his lifelong friend Danny Taylor’s property, and Ethan experiences a career transition from a grocery store clerk to owner of the grocery store, which at one time belonged to his own ancestors. Ethan’s cunning and unethical actions result in inheriting Danny’s property and in obtaining Mr. Marullo’s grocery store. Ethan’s duplicitous and evil plans to achieve unethical socioeconomic success occur while he is in the grocery store, in his house, or in other societal constructs. The Place induces a true assessment of reality along with a humane and compassionate response to socioeconomic hardship. Ethan, therefore, conducts himself with dual personalities that he indeed acknowledges, but Ethan never specifically knows where his certain thoughts and actions occur. Ironically, Ethan fully experiences hardship after achieving monetary wealth; Ethan has the realization that his socioeconomic success has negatively impacted the lives of Danny and Mr. Marullo. Nature, though, serves as the place where Ethan finds redemption in order to continue onward in socioeconomic society.

Steinbeck presents Christian ideas in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, both apparent and subtle. Peter Lisca assesses Steinbeck’s novel as “a sequence of events which, although obviously parallel to Christ’s Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, constitute ironic inversions of them” (177). Lisca’s astute commentary about Steinbeck’s inversions of Christianity can also be applied to other inversions that occur in the novel. Steinbeck’s novel not only provides parallels to William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, but Steinbeck inverts ideas from Shakespeare’s play, therefore creating a duality in response to the play. Ethan’s relationships with Danny Taylor, Richard Walder,
and Mr. Baker contain dualities. Dualities, therefore, abound in Steinbeck’s *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

*The Winter of Our Discontent* presents instances of socioeconomic successes that are honest and just. Richard Walder’s inclusion in the novel is briefly presented in just two scenes, yet he embodies socioeconomic success that is honest and kindhearted. The novel presents an abundance of socioeconomic successes that are obtained through deceit and greed while also presenting nature as healing and redemptive for a character’s well-being. Jackson J. Benson states that one of the themes in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is “the relationship of man to his environment” (990). Consistently, Steinbeck’s writing exudes awe and respect toward nature that is similar to Shakespeare’s respectful writing of nature in the play *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. In each of these texts, the characters never blame or revolt against nature. The characters’ dialogue about nature and their actions while in nature present a respect for nature’s power. Steinbeck’s writing is inspirational regarding nature’s beauty and solace. Luchen Li assesses Steinbeck’s writing with the following: “Another unusual set of morals in Steinbeck’s work regard humanity’s perplexing relation to nature” (67). Steinbeck uses nature in *The Winter of Our Discontent* as powerful and influential to induce honesty and kindheartedness from Ethan. Ethan has the dual influences of socioeconomics and nature; nature, though, surpasses socioeconomics at the novel’s conclusion as more influential and powerful.

This paper argues for “hardship versus redemption” duality as form of literary criticism because Steinbeck discreetly asserts that individuals’ battles with socioeconomic hardships can be healed/resolved using nature as guidance in decision making. Li states, “Steinbeck’s moral judgment of the American social and political
temperament is often rooted in his fear that one’s feverish nervousness to reach goals through unethical means will break down the integrity of individuals” (72). Li also writes, “In Steinbeck’s writing, we see people tearing themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness” (73). Ethan exemplifies both of Li’s statements. Li then writes, “Steinbeck ponders, ‘Maybe nothing can be done about it, but I am … naively hopeful enough to want to try’ … Such is the purpose or the ‘reason’ for him to write The Winter of Our Discontent” (78). This paper then argues that Steinbeck is providing a positive outlet to retaliate, surpass, and then conquer the “nervousness and covetousness”; the outlet that Steinbeck uses is ultimately nature.

Steinbeck uses nature in The Winter of Our Discontent to teach Ethan to convert his heretofore legacy of frivolous joy and brief pedagogy to his children into a legacy of serious respect for life, confrontation, and truthful dialogue with others. The title of Steinbeck’s The Winter of Our Discontent can be found in Shakespeare’s first line of The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, spoken by Richard Gloucester (before he becomes King Richard III): “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York” (Shakespeare, Norton 548). Steinbeck subtly advocates using a serious voice to express one’s true intentions as opposed to a false and frivolous voice, and Steinbeck’s advocation alludes to a scene in Shakespeare’s The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. In 4.4 of Shakespeare’s play, Richard III’s mother, the Duchess of York, and his sister-in-law, Queen Elizabeth, are analyzing their agonies of losing their family members due to Richard III’s murderous actions. The following passage from Shakespeare’s play contains this correlative concept in Steinbeck’s novel:

Duchess of York Why should calamity be full of words?
Queen Elizabeth

Windy attorneys to their client woes,²

Airy recorders of intestate joys,³

Poor breathing orators of miseries.

Let them have scope. (607)

The editors Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus translate Elizabeth’s second line with the following: “3 Words record joys that have died without bequeathing anything” (Shakespeare, Norton 607); this crucial Shakespearean line is correlative to Ethan’s heretofore life. Per the definition of intestate, “(of a person) not having made a will” (Webster’s 1000), Ethan has not made a serious and honest will or gift - via his voice - to his family, friends, and associates. Ethan’s predominant “record” until the novel’s conclusion is for continually giving a joyful and false voice to others that has not been helpful or beneficial to them.

In “‘To the other side of home where the lights are given’: Ethan Allen Hawley’s Search for Meaning in Steinbeck’s The Winter of Our Discontent,” Barbara A. Heavilin explicates in strong detail Ethan’s moral legacy to his progeny. Heavilin states that Steinbeck’s “address to his readers is an implied urgency: they must themselves become light givers and pass along a nation’s penchant for greatness in spirit to offset its inherent greediness before it is too late” (“other” 102). Heavilin furthermore cites Viktor Frankl who analyzes Steinbeck’s symbolic use of light and its legacy “in terms of responsibleness” (“other” 102). To add to Heavilin’s explication of the legacy of the light and Frankl’s explication of the responsibility toward one’s legacy, the legacy that Ethan finally learns to give to his progeny encompasses seriousness, truthfulness, and deep commitment to life – not a careless joy and superficial frivolity. Ethan’s legacy until the
last two chapters of *The Winter of Our Discontent* has been predominantly jocularity and deflection along with a lack of committing his patient time to his society.

Ethan maintains a few constants in his life, such as his admiration and respect for his grandfather and his aunt and also his routine of going to work. Another powerful constant in Ethan’s life is his viewpoint regarding plagiarism. Ethan does not experience a duality of conduct (when analyzing in nature or discussing in socioeconomic settings) his abhorrence to plagiarism; Ethan, therefore, does not have conflicting views about plagiarism. Ethan also has a bond with Richard Walder because they both reject plagiarism.

Steinbeck’s discreet philosophical message to readers of *The Winter of Our Discontent* is that socioeconomic hardship can be overcome and redemption found via various means, such as immersing oneself in the solace and guidance of nature, remembering the helpful lessons of one’s ancestors, giving helpful lessons to one’s own progeny and younger generations, and enacting acts of kindness onto others in socioeconomic society. Predominantly, Steinbeck’s use of nature as redemption in *The Winter of Our Discontent* signifies that nature can be used as an outlet to find ethical answers in response to socioeconomic hardship. Steinbeck states the following in his 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “The ancient commission of the writer is unchanged. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures … Furthermore, the writer must declare and celebrate man’s proven capacity for courage, compassion and love, for gallantry in defeat, for greatness of heart and spirit” (McPheron 59). In the novel, Steinbeck documents Ethan’s failures, and then Steinbeck presents how Ethan finds salvation while in nature. Steinbeck believes in redemption for humankind,
which is exemplified when he gives Ethan the ultimate chance at redemption in the novel’s conclusion. *The Winter of Our Discontent* subtly enforces that nature is an extremely helpful guide in attaining redemption through difficulties. Steinbeck’s 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech provides succinct explanation regarding his responsibilities in writing the 1961 (published) novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*, which in turn is about Ethan’s socioeconomic hardships of 1960 New York and how he then fulfills Steinbeck’s belief in individuals attaining the “capacity for courage, compassion, and love” (McPheron 59). Steinbeck’s novel subtly advocates using nature as a guide to find righteous resolutions in response to socioeconomic hardships.

Ethan undergoes various hardships throughout *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Steinbeck presents Ethan’s choices and dilemmas and the paths he takes. Steinbeck always counters Ethan’s hardships with the gift of following a path toward redemption. Nature continually serves as a place of redemption for Ethan. Steinbeck’s “hardship versus redemption” duality in the novel positively asserts redemption as the more powerful force.
CHAPTER II
NATURE SETTINGS

Nature in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is consistently a positive and redemptive part of Ethan’s life. Ethan experiences hardships throughout the novel, and nature serves as a redemptive and replenishing place of retreat from socioeconomic society.

Ethan’s solitary place of contemplation is called Place (Steinbeck, *Winter* 43), making Ethan’s sea cave a proper noun. Ethan assesses, “On the edge of the silted and sanded up Old Harbor, right where the Hawley dock had been, the stone foundation is still there … That is my Place, the place everybody needs” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 43). Ironically and symbolically, the Place was once a socioeconomic construct that has now been reclaimed by nature. Steinbeck uses the uppercase ‘P’ in Place throughout the novel until Ethan reveals the heretofore secret Place to Mary in the second-last chapter of the novel by stating, “There’s a place. I have to go there” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 273). Ethan’s statement contradicts his earlier assessment of the Place in Chapter Three of the novel: “It’s a safety place – everyone must have one, although I never heard a man tell of it” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 36).
Ethan’s simple revelation to Mary subtly yet powerfully foreshadows Ethan’s future actions. By revealing the Place, Ethan is relinquishing his confidential reliance on the Place because it will no longer be needed due to his goal, a planned suicide. Yet the Place alters this goal because Ethan gains inspiration to live while there.

Literary critics give various analyses of Ethan’s Place. Heavilin views Ethan’s secret Place as a place of non-confrontation and of denial. Heavilin describes Ethan’s behavior in the Place as his “retreat from the mundane to his private, secret world where he can avoid the intimacy of sharing and escape into self-absorption” (“other” 107). Michael Meyer refers to Ethan’s Place as a “tomb-like structure” (“Citizen” 203), a seemingly negative description of Ethan’s Place. But Nathaniel Philbrick provides a positive analysis with the following: “The Place is where Steinbeck evokes the underlying biological imperatives at work in the community” (236). Ethan uses his Place not only to be self-absorbed but also to think about societal pressures and find reinvigoration and redemption in order to reenter society refreshed and ready to try again in socioeconomic trials. Steinbeck provides examples of Ethan’s reinvigoration back in society after experiencing solitary contemplation in the Place, his secret place in nature.

Within nature and upon leaving nature, Ethan is replenished because he then enacts virtuous deeds. For example, when Ethan leaves the Place during his Good Friday visit, he encounters his friend Danny Taylor. In his conversation with Danny, Ethan is truthful and serious. His words are opposite of “Airy recorders of intestate joys” (Shakespeare, Norton 607). Ethan’s statements are void of frivolity and superficiality. Instead, Ethan honestly confronts Danny and acknowledges him with the following: “You were my brother, Danny. You still are. I’ll do anything in the world to help you”
(Steinbeck, *Winter* 48). Ethan also gives Danny money to buy alcohol. Steinbeck’s first presentation of Ethan with Danny in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is void of greed; rather two friends are being honest and brotherly with each other. Another example occurs after Ethan’s villainy against Danny and Mr. Marullo. In Chapter Eighteen when Ethan is in the sun near the beach with Mary, Ethan responds seriously and truthfully to Mary’s question about Mr. Marullo. Mary asks, “How is he taking it?” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 239). Ethan gives respect and seriousness to Mary’s question and to Mr. Marullo’s predicament with the following answer: “With dignity. With honor” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 239). Following Ethan’s response, Steinbeck writes the following long sentence: “We walked on the beach as we had thought we might, sat in the sand, picked up small bright shells and showed them to each other, as we must do, spoke with conventional wonder about natural things, the sea, the air, the light, the wind-cooled sun, as though the Creator were listening in for compliments” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 239). This sentence is its own paragraph. Hence, in nature, Ethan removes his concealment and jolly attitude. Instead, Ethan expresses to Mary how he truly feels about Mr. Marullo while they are in nature (by the beach) just as he truthfully speaks with Danny after his visit to the Place. Steinbeck relays Ethan’s behavior after leaving his redemptive time in the Place; Ethan is direct and confrontational, of which these are rare occurrences for Ethan in the novel.

Ethan addresses Mary using her proper name in only a few scenes in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, and two of these instances occur while Ethan is in nature. In the first scene, Mary and Ethan are walking home from their visit to the Bakers. Outside in nature, Mary and Ethan are enmeshed in a socioeconomic quarrel about the money inherited
from Mary’s brother. Throughout this scene, Ethan uses Mary’s proper name to address her rather than a nickname, which Ethan customarily uses. In this scene, Ethan is direct, truthful, and serious with Mary. Mary eases the tension by stating that she sees something. Ethan responds, “What was it, Mary? Tell me! What did you see?”; also, “You didn’t see anything, Mary” (Steinbeck, Winter 114). Mary answers, “I saw a quarrel – but it got away” (Steinbeck, Winter 114). Nature, thus, serves as a mediator between two debaters, and nature serves as a place for aiding confrontation.

In another instance, Ethan’s demeanor drastically changes from anger to love when Ethan goes outside to cut the grass. At first, Ethan is angry that his child Allen is rebelling against working in the grocery store. Mary sides with Allen, calling Ethan a “tyrant” (Steinbeck, Winter 171). Ethan’s anger is due to his wish to instill high morals and ethics while his son is partaking in socioeconomic experiences, i.e. partaking in the experience of work. Ethan is vehemently teaching his son about honesty because he has lost his recently, yet Ethan does not give patience and endurance to further teach his child. Rather, Allen asks permission to leave, and Ethan allows the end of this dispute. But then, while cutting the grass, Ethan’s demeanor changes to compassion. Steinbeck writes, “Ethan called, ‘Mary, Mary, my darling. I love you.’ And the whirling blades raged through the overgrown grass” (Winter 171). Again, Ethan’s presence in nature alters his demeanor, changing his impatience and anger toward affirmations of love. Ethan’s rage is eased by cutting the grass. Nature has taken Ethan’s displaced anger. In these two scenes that present Ethan’s use of the proper name Mary, Ethan is honestly and seriously showing himself to his spouse. These two scenes contrast Ethan’s other occasions of using Mary’s nicknames, which are the times that Ethan presents a wall or
mask. His true self is not shown because he is joking, similar to Richard III being coy, false, and cunningly smooth in his conversations with his family members.

The previously stated examples of Ethan’s behavior within nature aligns with William Ray’s definition of “animist,” which “approximates the condition of oneness between man and nature, subject and object, thought and thing, that the literary theorist Northrop Frye believed to be the universal condition of human languages in their earliest poetic phase” (137). In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan has a positive bond/relationship with nature.

Shakespeare uses nature abundantly in *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* to explicate human behavior and feeling, which is synonymous with Steinbeck’s abundant use of nature in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Both *The Winter of Our Discontent* and *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* begin and conclude with star imagery. Steinbeck’s novel begins, “When the fair gold morning of April stirred” (Steinbeck, *Winter 3*). The sun, a star, is referred to as gold. Shakespeare’s play begins, “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York” (*Norton* 548). In the footnote to the play, the editors explain “son of York” as “wordplay on Edward’s emblem, a sun in splendor” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 548). In the last chapter of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Steinbeck references stars as symbols of Ethan’s predicament with the following: “Then I could see a star – late rising, too late rising over the edge” (275). This sentence is comparable to Richard III, who metaphorically analyzes the sun’s omission from the start of his day in battle with Henry, Earl of Richmond (Shakespeare, *Norton* 625).
John Steinbeck consistently presents nature as redemptive hope and solace in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Steinbeck presents Ethan’s visits to nature as a seeming necessity for living and for replenishment. Ethan’s hardships in socioeconomic society find honorable answers while he is in nature.
CHAPTER III
SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS

Ethan’s socioeconomic experiences are a major part of The Winter of Our Discontent. Throughout the majority of the novel, the concept of socioeconomics is connoted with hardship. Oftentimes in the novel, Steinbeck presents socioeconomics in subtle and/or symbolic ways while Steinbeck’s other explications of socioeconomics are in a blatant, direct, and matter-of-fact manner.

The Winter of Our Discontent’s Good Friday beginning is not only an important date in Christianity, but it is also an important date in American socioeconomic society. Joey Morphy states the following to Ethan about Mr. Marullo’s arrival in the United States: “I guess it’s because he says he’s been here forty years” (Steinbeck, Winter 131); and, “That would make it 1920” (Steinbeck, Winter 131). Hence, Steinbeck uses Joey Morphy’s mathematical calculations to present that the novel takes place in 1960. Steinbeck also directly writes, “This year of 1960 was a year of change” (Winter 249). The Book of Common Prayer states that the specific date of Easter 1960 is April 17, 1960 (liv). Therefore, the specific date of Good Friday 1960 is April 15, 1960. The deadline in
1960 for filing U.S. income taxes is April 15, 1960 (“Tax Day in the United States”). Steinbeck, though, never mentions the income tax deadline in the novel. Lisca writes, “The novel begins with Ethan’s awakening on Good Friday morning and is half over by Easter Monday. From this point, time is telescoped to the Fourth of July weekend, which takes up the last quarter of the book” (181). Lisca then analyzes, “These two holidays in their respective moral and patriotic, individual and national substance, provide the structural poles of Steinbeck’s novel” (181). But hidden within the novel’s Good Friday start is the United States due date of income taxes which requires individual socioeconomic responsibility. The novel’s April 15, 1960 start symbolically links a Christian holiday to a crucial day in American socioeconomic life.

The topic of money - getting money honestly and being corruptive for money - pervades The Winter of Our Discontent. William McPheron describes Steinbeck’s novel as “a scathing indictment of America’s spiritual poverty” (7), and Benson states that the novel “puts its finger on the malaise of the American soul” (899). Also, Benson writes the following about Steinbeck: “Later he would take delight in the title of his new book because it was a quotation from Richard III, a play that he thought in any number of ways fit the times” (861). Ethan’s Machiavellian actions, thus, save his family from socioeconomic poverty, but his duplicitous ways to achieve socioeconomic success cause him to experience a “spiritual poverty” (7), as McPherson astutely states.

In The Associated Press interview of 1961, Hal Boyle documents the following statements by Steinbeck:

“The whole world is in a state of shock,” said author John Steinbeck.

“That is why people don’t think.
“You can’t think when you’re in a state of shock.” …

“Again we’re seeing the breakup of old forms of authority – religious, governmental, even parental – before new ones are established,” he said …

“That’s why people are so restless and worried. They don’t know what to tie to” (76).

Steinbeck’s observations stated in this interview find their fictitious corollary in The Winter of Our Discontent. In the novel, Steinbeck writes, “And it wasn’t only the nation; the whole world stirred with restlessness and uneasiness as discontent moved to anger and anger tried to find an outlet in action, any action so long as it was violent” (249). This passage proves that Steinbeck is abiding by his belief that he states in his 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “The ancient commission of the writer is unchanged. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures” (McPheron 59). Steinbeck is an artist of his word: what he said and proclaimed a writer should do is indeed what he did and accomplished.

Steinbeck indeed presents Ethan’s grievous faults by sharing Ethan’s solitary thoughts. In the socioeconomic environs of the grocery store, many of Ethan’s greedy socioeconomic analyses take place. For example, Steinbeck is not subtle when he presents Ethan’s ruminations about Danny’s imminent death. Ethan is shockingly evil when he assesses Danny’s imminent death. In spite of his childhood friendship with Danny and in spite of his knowledge of Danny’s loyal acts of friendship, Ethan calculates the following about Danny after giving him $1,000.00: “Danny was troubling, even though I could with perfect truth assume that he was finished anyway” (Steinbeck, Winter 216). Ethan’s objective analysis is jolting. This sentence from Chapter Fourteen of the
novel proves Ethan is now ice-cold in his business transactions whereas he previously joked to Mary in Chapter Thirteen, “No wonder they call you the Vixen of Wall Street. That ice-cold, diamond-sharp business mind – it’s frightening” (Steinbeck, Winter 194). Ethan’s jocularly stated description of Mary is rather an indirect and concealed description of himself. Steinbeck’s use of “ice” is analogous to Shakespeare’s use of “ice” when Richard III states the following to Buckingham about murdering his nephews: “Tut, tut, thou art all ice. Thy kindness freezes. / Say, have I thy consent that they shall die?” (Shakespeare, Norton 601). Both Richard III and Ethan displace their own evil machinations onto innocent people.

In the grocery store, Ethan is also evil in his ruminations about Mr. Marullo, seemingly justifying his act of contacting the immigration service. In thought, Ethan lists various derogatory titles upon Mr. Marullo (Steinbeck, Winter 219). Then Ethan reflects, “I having destroyed him, it was only natural that his faults and crimes should become blindingly apparent to me” (Steinbeck, Winter 219). Ethan’s evil ruminations about Mr. Marullo occur while he is in a socioeconomic construct (the grocery store) just as his evil ruminations about Danny’s imminent death occur in the socioeconomic environs of the grocery store. (Interestingly, whether these ruminations about Danny are in the alley right outside the grocery store near the bank or actually in the grocery store cannot be ascertained from Steinbeck’s text.) Therefore, these two examples of Ethan’s evil thoughts that occur in or very near socioeconomic constructs serve as contrast to nature where Ethan does not ruminate upon evil thoughts or duplicitous machinations.

In spite of Ethan’s self-acknowledgement of his ruminations and plans, he does not reveal to society these planned actions to acquire wealth although Mr. Banks and
Margie gives Ethan powerful feedback after his acquisition of wealth. Ethan’s conduct correlates to the conclusion of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* when King Henry VII states, “The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 627). Specifically, Ethan never confronts and agrees with Danny’s bold analysis to him: “You’re betting that a thousand dollars’ worth of booze with kill me” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 120). Also, Ethan anonymously calls the immigration department to turn in Mr. Marullo. Ethan keeps society blind to his duplicitous actions, yet Mr. Banks realizes Ethan’s true conduct upon learning of his inheritance. Margie Young-Hunt, though, has the foresight to ascertain Ethan’s character without receiving much information from Ethan. At the conclusion of the novel in Chapter Twenty-One, Margie reveals her understanding of Ethan by stating, “You’ve got all your life to answer” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 266). Prior to this, Steinbeck gives Margie the keenness to ascertain Ethan’s conduct, more so than any other character in the novel. In Margie’s first scene in the novel, Ethan states, “I hear you’re going to read Mary’s fortune today” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 17). Margie’s fortune-telling in Steinbeck’s novel is correlative to Queen Margaret in 1.3 of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, who warns others the following about herself: “And say, ‘Poor Margaret was a prophetess’” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 563). In addition, Steinbeck names his character “Margie,” using the nickname of Margaret. In Chapter Twelve, Steinbeck writes that Margie “gradually became aware of Ethan, bound in another kind of trauma, a social-economic bind that had robbed him of strength and certainty” (*Winter* 173). Steinbeck’s choice of Margie (rather than anyone else) as fully intelligent of Ethan’s character is an example of feminist writing, which provides a contrast to the misogynistic description of Margie in Chapter Twelve.
Margie Young-Hunt’s ability to understand Ethan’s character aligns with Stephen K. George’s analysis of virtue ethics. In “The Philosophical Mind of John Steinbeck: Virtue Ethics and His Later Fiction,” George describes “Steinbeck’s focus on good and evil, the individual in conflict with these forces” (267). Furthermore, George explains “that critical approach known as virtue ethics, a branch of ethical inquiry, as old as Aristotle and Aquinas” (“Philosophical” 267-68). George then cites James Rachels and states, “The central ethical question of virtue ethics is not ‘What is the right thing to do?’, but rather ‘What traits of character make one a good person?’” (“Philosophical” 268).

Therefore, Margie’s insistence to Ethan in Chapter One about his future success initially seems superficial and ineffectual. Yet Margie’s words adumbrate Ethan’s future socioeconomic success. Margie’s ability to read Ethan’s character adheres to George’s analysis in that Margie could sense that Ethan’s character traits were already inclined toward a pending action even though heretofore Ethan’s actions have been just and moral.

Ethan, though, limits his greed by not partaking in an affair with Margie Young-Hunt. Just as Ethan rejects the N.B.C. representative’s monetary proposition, Ethan’s rejection of Margie’s romantic proposition indicates ethical conduct. In the same evening prior to his attempted suicide, Ethan visits Margie. Margie propositions him with the following explanation concerning her ex-husband: “When he cools, the checks stop. I’m old and lazy and I’m scared. I set you up as a backlog, but I don’t trust you. You might break the rules. You might turn honest” (Steinbeck, Winter 267). Margie’s explanation is definitive socioeconomics. Meyer writes that Margie uses “her sexuality to gain economic leverage” (“American” 86). Ethan does not offer a verbal response; rather
Steinbeck gives Ethan an immediate action to assert his opposition to Margie’s proposition. Steinbeck writes, “I stood up and found my legs were heavy, not wavery – just heavy and remote” (Winter 267). Ethan has rejected Margie’s socioeconomic proposition. Steinbeck’s scene is in contrast to the romantic greed that Richard III attains when he convinces Queen Anne to marry him and when he convinces Queen Elizabeth to give her consent in marrying her daughter. Steinbeck, therefore, gives Ethan the chance to redeem himself by not having an affair with Margie.

A passage from “Book IX” of Plato’s The Republic correlates to Ethan’s progression from evil and greed, to defeat and resignation, and then to hopeful redemption in The Winter of Our Discontent. Plato analyzes the individual who is “in virtue of his power, becoming more and more envious, faithless, unjust, friendless, unholy, and the host and nurse of every vice; and, in consequence of all this, he must in the first place be unhappy in himself” (333). Plato then explains, “He is the happiest man who is best and most just, that is, who is most kingly, and who rules over himself royally; whereas he is the most wretched man who is worst and most unjust” (334). The concluding sentences in Chapter Nine of The Winter of Our Discontent present Ethan’s belief about socioeconomic advancement. Ethan analyzes, “A man must carve and maul his way through men to get to be King of the Mountain. Once there, he can be great and kind – but he must get there first” (Steinbeck, Winter 153). Ethan’s analysis is in supreme contrast to Plato’s philosophy, which creates a duality with Plato’s words. Ethan’s philosophy, though, does not prove true after he “mauls” his friend Danny and boss Mr. Marullo to obtain socioeconomic success. Ethan, thus, has flippantly assessed his capacity to handle his plans. Ethan’s unjust actions make him wretched, according to

Ethan’s philosophy of mauling his way to the top is denial. But in the novel’s last chapter, Ethan confronts and acknowledges his role to keep living in order for his daughter Ellen to have a just life. Ethan’s hope for Ellen is indicative of acting “royally of himself” and redeeming himself.

John Steinbeck keenly presents Ethan Allen Hawley’s socioeconomic world in blatant and direct ways and also in discreet and symbolic ways in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. 
CHAPTER IV
MERGING OF NATURE AND SOCIOECONOMICS

In the midst of the “hardship versus redemption” duality between nature and socioeconomics, Steinbeck provides periodic unity or meshing between nature and socioeconomics in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Steinbeck presents various instances of nature and socioeconomics’ relationship with each other.

One such passage from the novel that exemplifies the relationship between nature and socioeconomics is the following: “The piles in the water by the city pier are triple logs iron-banded at the top … On top of each one a gull stood motionless, usually a male with white immaculate vest and clean gray wings. I wonder if each one owns his place and can sell or rent it at will” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 145). Ethan tries to impart the human construct of socioeconomics onto nature to find similarities between human societies and bird (natural) societies. This example also is one of the abundant “interior monologues and soliloquies” (Lisca 178) that Steinbeck presents concerning Ethan’s solitary thoughts and/or contemplations.
In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, an example of nature and socioeconomics merging is contained in the novel’s title because a natural phenomenon – winter – is used to metaphorically describe Ethan’s difficult socioeconomic experiences during a few months of his life in 1960. Therefore, Steinbeck’s title of the novel is symbolic. Steinbeck’s novel does not take place in winter. Because winter is never part of the physical action or setting of the novel, winter symbolizes the ice-cold calculations of Ethan Hawley. Ethan’s ice-cold or “key-cold” (Shakespeare, Handy 338 and Norton 551) calculations are analogous to the ice-cold calculations of Richard III. In *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, the editors define “key-cold” in the following footnote: “Proverbial for ‘cold as death’” (Shakespeare, Norton 551). In *The Handy-Volume Shakspeare [sic]*, the “Glossary” states the following definition for “key-cold”: “intensely cold, cold as iron” (Shakespeare, Handy 338). Greenblatt states the following about Richard III: “Shakespeare’s Richard is a consummate portrait of … a ‘machiavel’ … Machiavelli had counseled princes to lie, cheat, and murder under the cover of hypocritical professions of virtue and piety” (Shakespeare, Norton 540). Similarly, Hayashi writes, “Ethan’s journey is through both the world of Richard III, where Shakespeare’s superbly-portrayed Machiavellian hero is ‘determined to prove a villain’ (*Richard III*, I. i. 30), and the world of *Macbeth*” (109). Ethan’s assessment about Danny’s imminent death is indeed Machiavellian.

Hassell A. Simpson’s translation of two Anglo-Saxon sentences (310) in *The Winter of Our Discontent* provides an example of nature and socioeconomics merging within the novel. In the article “Steinbeck’s Anglo-Saxon ‘Wonder-Words’ and the American Paradox,” Simpson translates these two sentences. The first is the following:
“Me beswac fah wyrm thurh faegir word” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 231). Simpson’s translation is the following: “The serpent deceived me through fair words [and I ate the forbidden fruit]” (311). The other sentence is the following: “Seo leo gif heo blades onbirigth abit aerest hire ladteow” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 231). Simpson’s translation is the following: “The [tamed and chained] lion, if she tastes blood, bites first her master” (312-13).

Simpson analyzes, “Such obscurity as exists here lies in Steinbeck’s having cast his major themes in two elliptical sentences drawn from different works and written in an archaic language” (314). Steinbeck uses nature metaphor (in another language, Anglo-Saxon) to describe Ethan’s experiences in socioeconomic hardship. The serpent is analogous to each person who visits Ethan with advice regarding how to achieve unethical socioeconomic success.

*The Winter of Our Discontent* is inundated with visitors who give their advice and/or important information to Ethan. Throughout the novel, Ethan receives advice from many people. Mr. Marullo, Joey Morphy, Margie Young-Hunt, Mr. Baker, Richard Walder, Chief Stoney, and Mr. Biggers give their messages to Ethan, and Ethan receives these messages most often within the grocery store. The messages most often are about ways Ethan can achieve socioeconomic success. Ethan is the lion who “tastes blood” (Simpson 312), which is his taste for greed, and then he attacks Danny and Mr. Marullo, who have been kind and caring to him. Simpson writes of “Ethan’s apparently excessive response to the temptations embodied in the remarks of acquaintances” (310). Ethan indeed has acquaintances, such as Joey Morphy, Mr. Biggers, Margie Young-Hunt, and Chief Stoney, whereas Mr. Marullo and Mr. Baker are more than mere acquaintances. Richard Walder initially seems to be an acquaintance, but he fulfills the role of brother’s
keeper to Ethan along with Mr. Marullo. Also, Richard Walder does not fulfill the role of serpent as do many of Ethan’s other visitors/messengers. Ethan, therefore, discreetly provides succinct analysis of his many socioeconomic messengers while also discreetly explaining his own conduct regarding his socioeconomic experiences.

Ethan has so many socioeconomic messengers in his life tempting his morality. Similarly, in *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, Shakespeare’s list of “The Persons of the Play” includes “Hastings, a Pursuivant” and “messengers” (Shakespeare, Norton 547). The Pursuivant, though, only appears in one scene, 3.2 (Shakespeare, Norton 586). Per the footnote of the play, “Figuratively, a pursuivant was any summoner or messenger” (Shakespeare, Norton 586). Throughout Shakespeare’s play, messengers also abound to relay information to not only Richard III but to others, such as Henry, Earl of Richmond; King Edward IV; George, Duke of Clarence; and Queen Elizabeth. Like Richard III, Ethan too is seemingly bombarded with pursuivants.

In Chapter Fourteen, Ethan observes and ponders upon the socioeconomic greed in the fishing industry because of the overabundance of fish caught, creating waste for human society. Steinbeck writes the following:

The frantic summer fishermen who pay a price and glut the decks with fish and in the afternoon wonder vaguely what to do with them, sacks and baskets and mountains of porgies and blows and blackfish, sea robins, and even slender dogfish, all to be torn up greedily, to die, and to be thrown back for the waiting gulls. The gulls swarm and wait, knowing the summer fishermen will sicken of their plenty (Winter 203).
The above two statements foreshadow Ethan’s attitude at the conclusion of *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Ethan never directly asserts his sickness with his greedy actions, yet the “plenty” that he has obtained - Danny’s land, Mr. Marullo’s store - leads him to his planned suicide. Chapter Fourteen is filled with nature imagery serving as metaphorical correlation to Ethan’s conscience, remorse, and guilt. Nature is once again teaching Ethan about his own behavior by presenting to him the observation of the waste created due to catching too much fish.

Ethan’s analysis of the greed and waste within the fishing industry is one example of Ethan’s role as an ecocritic within the novel. Derek Gladwin writes, “His [Steinbeck’s] ecological perspectives have been recognized with increasing regularity because of the growing interest in the environment, environmental writing, nature writing, and ecocriticism” (65). Gladwin also cites Aldo Leopold who states, “It is inconceivable … that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land” (73). Richard E. Hart writes, “Without doubt Steinbeck’s ecological message – his desire to understand and cooperate with the environment … was well ahead of its time” (51). Ethan’s role as an ecocritic assessing socioeconomics’ abuse upon nature asserts his awe and respect of nature.

Ethan analyzes the similarity of socioeconomic conduct from his grandfather’s era to his present-day society. Steinbeck writes the following about whaling: “It was a rare partnership, he [grandfather/Old Cap’n] said, that lasted more than one voyage, and blistering feuds ever afterward, continuing after the cause was forgotten” (*Winter* 47). Ethan also remembers his father’s influential analysis of Old Cap’n’s whaling days: “Some dignity was then for a man, some stature. A man could breathe” (Steinbeck,
Ethan’s father assesses the past as noble versus the present as constricting. Ethan bitterly views his father as “the fool” (Steinbeck, Winter 47). In contrast to his father, Ethan is seeking to equate his grandfather’s difficult socioeconomic experiences to present-day socioeconomic hardships. Ethan believes that socioeconomic hardships throughout history are similar to socioeconomic hardships occurring in his present day. While Ethan does indeed make this analysis while in the Place (on Good Friday), Ethan analyzes solely as a realist in this scene without devising any greedy or devious machinations for himself to succeed socioeconomically. Even Lisca states the following about Ethan’s visit to the Place on Good Friday: “Although making no overt decisions at this time, he comes to accept the principles necessary for worldly success” (183). In The Winter of Our Discontent, Steinbeck demarcates nature as redemption, guidance, and peace versus the abundance of hardship, struggle, and bitterness in socioeconomic society.

While in his secret Place on Good Friday, Ethan remembers his father’s analysis about Old Cap’n’s conduct toward Mr. Baker even though Old Cap’n believed Mr. Baker’s father purposefully burned the Belle-Adair. Steinbeck writes the following regarding Old Cap’n Hawley: “He never spoke to Cap’n Baker again, my father told me, but he didn’t carry it to his son, Mr. Banker Baker. He wouldn’t do that any more than he would burn a ship” (Steinbeck, Winter 48). Therefore, Ethan realizes his grandfather lived by disciplined and judicial conduct. Old Cap’n did not displace his anger toward Cap’n Baker onto someone else, i.e. his progeny. Thus Old Cap’n Hawley assesses displaced anger and arson as equal crimes, which in turn asserts Old Cap’n Hawley’s high ethical conduct. Old Cap’n views the individual responsibility of each person; a
familial relation cannot answer another family member’s conduct. Ethan recalls his
grandfather’s words, “There’s the only power – one man alone. Can’t depend on anything
else” (Steinbeck, Winter 48). Furthermore, Li assesses, “The source of virtue in
Steinbeck’s ethics lies in his development of the ideas so as to explain the source and
nature of conscience, i.e. of a man’s capacity to judge his own actions and especially of
his sense of duty” (77). Ergo, to Steinbeck individuals must take sole responsibility for
their conduct.

The “hardship versus redemption” duality between socioeconomics and nature pervades The Winter of Our Discontent, but John Steinbeck does not fully separate nature from socioeconomics. Instead, in the novel Steinbeck periodically shows a relationship between nature and socioeconomics. The author asserts a redemptive quality between these two with nature needed to resolve hardships that occur in socioeconomic society. The novel’s final scene is indicative of nature serving as solace in response to Ethan’s agony in socioeconomic society. Therefore, while delineating the contrast between nature and socioeconomics in The Winter of Our Discontent, Steinbeck presents scenes where nature and socioeconomics merge and relate with each other.
CHAPTER V
PEDAGOGICAL LESSONS

Ethan experiences a “hardship versus redemption” duality regarding his pedagogical lessons to his own children. Ethan’s lack of patience to teach his children about plagiarism leads to the hardship of Allen’s plagiaristic essay writing. Ethan redeems the situation at the conclusion of the novel by not monetarily profiting from Allen’s mistake. Ethan, though, finds redemption throughout the novel by reminiscing upon the wise pedagogical lessons learned from his grandfather Old Cap’n and from his Aunt Deborah. Throughout *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan’s remembrances of these lessons serve as guidance and redemption as Ethan assesses his own actions and beliefs. In spite of the hardships Ethan feels and endures, Steinbeck inserts Old Cap’n and Aunt Deborah as reminders to Ethan of noble conduct that endures to progeny. Ethan’s continual appreciation of Old Cap’n’s and Aunt Deborah’s pedagogical lessons eventually guides Ethan to finally exert his own noble pedagogy onto his children and the N.B.C. representative. At the conclusion of the novel, Ethan indeed confronts the hardship of his child Allen’s mistake, and Ethan then asserts his noble ethics to redeem the situation.
Old Cap’n and Aunt Deborah have bequeathed their stern and serious pedagogies and confrontations, and Ethan expresses admirable feelings about them. George writes, “Old Cap’n Hawley and Aunt Deborah stand as symbols of moral solidity within a sea of change” (“Disintegration” 173). Therefore, Old Cap’n’s and Aunt Deborah’s words are not “Airy recorders of intestate joys” (Shakespeare, Norton 607). Only until Ethan’s rebuttal to the N.B.C. representative of Dunscombe, Brock and Schwin, Ethan maintains an ease and control behind a metaphorical mask. He jokes often while in social encounters and is portrayed in his social circumstances as calm and joyful, therefore not bequeathing any solid, true, and serious words of advice to his children. Ethan conjures up the courage to rebuke the representative without calculated forethought, but it is only in the last chapter of The Winter of Our Discontent that Ethan realizes that he must change his conduct in order to be helpful to Ellen the way his grandfather and aunt were sternly helpful to him. Up until the novel’s conclusion, Ethan has not made a serious, true, ethical, and verbal will even though he has obtained and thus given monetary gains (socioeconomic gifts) to his family. Up until the novel’s conclusion, Ethan adheres to Queen Elizabeth’s assessment of those who are failures because their words are only “Airy recorders of intestate joys” (Shakespeare, Norton 607). Therefore, Ethan’s joyful and false superficiality has served no long-term benefit to his family. Rather, he has not succeeded in the gift of patiently teaching his children serious humanitarianism.

Ethan reminisces upon Old Cap’n’s pedagogy while he is in his secret Place. Old Cap’n Hawley gives his words of wisdom and care to his grandchild Ethan. Ethan’s respect of and reliance on his grandfather’s teaching pervade his life. Ethan’s feelings for his grandfather convey a deep bond that is not conveyed regarding Ethan’s relationship
with his father. In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan is on the path of duplicating poor father/child relationships because he too has minimal, distanced, and quick conversations with his children. Meyer states, “Ethan’s conversations with his wife and children are punctuated by inane and banal comments. His flippant remarks to Mary, when she brings up family issues, indicate that he has chosen sarcasm and cynicism as a means of coping” (“American” 78). George describes Ethan’s flippant behavior as “a sort of recreation with morality (or immorality)” (“Disintegration” 177). Heavilin states, “Ethan’s language is a cover-up, a surface thing that rings false because he is false” (“other” 103). Ethan never has lengthy and teachable moments with his children like the teachable moments he has received from his grandfather. Whereas Ethan learns nautical terms from his grandfather while in nature, Ethan’s so-called teachable moments to his children occur in their house, albeit briefly.

In Chapter Three where Steinbeck first presents Ethan’s secret Place, here also is where Steinbeck presents Ethan’s first reflections about his grandfather, Old Cap’n Hawley. Ethan reflects upon his grandfather’s pedagogy of ascertaining where to locate the remains of the burned familial ship *Belle-Adair*. Ethan also recalls Old Cap’n using his narwhal stick to explain. Steinbeck writes the following concerning Old Cap’n’s pedagogy: “‘Take that third rock on Whitsun Reef,’ he said. ‘Got her? Now, line her up with the tip to Pointy Point at high water. See it there? Now – half a cable-length out on that line is where she lies, at least her keel’” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 47). Old Cap’n’s guiding words have created a horizontal line between the two points. Then Old Cap’n’s words infer the creation of a perpendicular line downward to the sea floor where the remainder of the ship is. Hence, Old Cap’n has created a ‘T’ cross, synonymous to Christianity and
Good Friday; Good Friday is the day Steinbeck first presents Ethan’s visit to the Place in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The ‘T’ cross is also known as the Cross of Tau ([Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)). Furthermore, “The tau was also considered a symbol of salvation due to the identification of the *tau* with the sign which in Ezechiel 9:4 was marked on the forehead of the saved ones” ([Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)). Therefore, Old Cap’n’s sign of the cross that he creates in the sea using his narwhal stick symbolizes Christianity and redemption that is found in nature. Li states, “Steinbeck’s perception and depiction of individual humans are often deeply rooted in his insight into the doctrines of western religion, particularly Christianity” (66). Lisca describes Ethan’s Place as “a dark cave (sepulcher)” (183) and “an earth-altar archetype” (187). Hart writes, “At his most poignant moments, Steinbeck engenders a powerful, though naively unappreciated, divinity about nature and particularly man” (52). Ethan’s Place is indeed a sacred area, his sacred Place. Old Cap’n’s symbolic and discreet sign of the cross alludes to Christianity, and Old Cap’n’s constructed cross also adds to the Christian ideas that are direct and apparent in the novel.

Old Cap’n’s symbolic ‘T’ cross is missing in the last chapter of *The Winter of Our Discontent* because Ethan has lost faith in his life and plans suicide while entering the Place. John Ditsky views Ethan’s planned suicide as “the ultimate rejection of the Resurrection” (“Winter” 46). Upon entering the Place intent on suicide, Ethan relates, “I could see the third rock, but from the Place it did not line up with the point over the sunken keel of the *Belle-Adair*” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 275). Ethan is unable to create the ‘T’ cross because he is intent on suicide rather than relying on his former pedagogy in being saved by the Christian cross.
Ethan’s lack of patient pedagogy toward his children is in severe contrast to his grandfather’s and aunt’s serious and patient pedagogies to him, thereby creating a duality. Steinbeck writes, “The old man had drilled me in his death as he had in ships. I knew what to do, inside myself and out” (Winter 43). Hence, Old Cap’n’s persistence as teacher shames Ethan’s lack of dedication and persistence as a teacher to his children. But at the end of the novel, Ethan duplicates Aunt Deborah’s stern pedagogy by telling Ellen to research the meaning of “talisman” in a dictionary. When Ellen questions this method, Ethan responds, “You’ll know it better if you look it up” (Steinbeck, Winter 262). Previously, Ethan ponders, “So many words are mine because Aunt Deborah first aroused my curiosity and then forced me to satisfy it by my own effort” (Steinbeck, Winter 201). In the second-last chapter of the novel, Ethan is passing down this inheritance to his child, yet he does so without informing Ellen of Aunt Deborah’s pedagogy to him.

Ethan’s lack of serious pedagogy to his children is displayed by his lack of patience and prescience regarding the topic of impending plagiarism by Allen. Ethan has zero tolerance about plagiarism. Ethan’s views here are clear-cut versus his deliberations and questions regarding money. Yet Ethan does not give enough time with his children to truly express the serious ramifications of plagiarism. If Ethan paid attention to Ellen subtly alluding to Allen’s act of plagiarism, he could have saved Allen. Regarding Ellen, Randall D. Miller asserts that Ethan’s “failure has been his not hearing what she says” (16). Miller also states, “Ellen serves as an element of conscience for her beleaguered father” (16). Instead, Ethan’s attitude has become consumed with getting money that he does not take heed to ascertain Ellen’s motives. Ethan questions Ellen if she has
plagiarized and has only briefly questioned her further. Ethan warns Ellen, “Don’t do it, my girl. Now what do you think about my tie?” (Steinbeck, Winter 149). Ethan’s quick resolution to the discussion and his abrupt transition toward discussing his necktie are poor and unwise pedagogy toward his children. Ethan does not patiently analyze Ellen’s motives for initiating this conversation, in which she so earnestly provides hints. In the novel, Steinbeck does not present Ethan’s commentary about his realization of Ellen’s subtle and hopefully redemptive act in trying to prevent Allen’s plagiarism.

Not only does Ethan fail in giving a serious pedagogical lesson to Allen, his progeny, but Ethan fails in honoring the serious pedagogical lessons from Old Cap’n, his ancestor, because he twists his grandfather’s pedagogy to assist in his newfound plans to achieve unethical socioeconomic success. Regarding Old Cap’n, Ethan recalls, “‘If a thing’s true, or even if it ain’t true and you mean it, sing out,’ he would cry.” (Steinbeck, Winter 43). Hence, 114 pages after Steinbeck writes this about Old Cap’n’s pedagogy, Ethan sings Shakespeare’s two introductory lines (1.1) of The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. At the conclusion of Part One in the novel, Ethan sings, “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York” (Steinbeck, Winter 157). In the play contained within the text The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition, “son” is used instead of “sun.” (Shakespeare 548). In the text The Tragedy of Richard the Third printed by Signet Classic in 1988, “sun” is used in line two of 1.1, similar to Steinbeck’s citation in The Winter of Our Discontent (Shakespeare 33). Ethan’s horrifying flippancy toward his greedy plans is expressed by reciting Richard III’s two lines as a song. Shakespeare’s words are serious and dramatic, but Ethan trivializes and vandalizes these words. Ditsky writes that Ethan “celebrates the Easter of his betrayal of
his friend by singing Shakespeare’s lines from the opening of *Richard III*, the source of the novel’s title, and thus ironically waxing festive” (“Capacity” 174). By singing out these lines, Ethan is perversely adhering to his grandfather’s pedagogy of making something become true. Ethan then is forcing himself (teaching himself) to become like Shakespeare’s Richard III, an evil and greedy villain. George astutely describes Ethan’s change as “psychological disintegration” (“Philosophical” 275). Ethan even reaffirms his decision to sing by concluding Part One of the novel, “I know it’s not a song, but I sang it” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 157). At the conclusion of Part One in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan Allen Hawley becomes a sociopath. Ethan creates a duality with his grandfather’s pedagogy by manipulating Old Cap’n’s words to accommodate his goals.

In Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, lines three and four of 1.1 are analogous to Steinbeck’s novel which presents Old Cap’n’s story of the *Belle-Adair*’s keel on the sea floor. Shakespeare writes, “And all the clouds that loured upon our house / In the deep bosom of the ocean buried” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 548). Old Cap’n’s keel too is buried on the sea floor. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, initially speaks of peace and hope finally achieved, but then his soliloquy contains vengeance and evil. Similarly, Old Cap’n explains to Ethan the suspicious history of the *Belle-Adair*, but Old Cap’n does not seek vengeance whereas Ethan does seek vengeance on Mr. Baker. Both Richard III and Ethan instigate evil actions. Ethan takes full responsibility for his unethical actions against Danny Taylor and Mr. Marullo. Ethan shares, “I did not ever draw virtue down to hide what I was doing from myself. No one made me take the course I had chosen” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 200). Ethan’s acceptance of sole responsibility adheres to his grandfather’s words of wisdom about “the only power – one man alone”
(Steinbeck, *Winter* 48). Li explains Steinbeck’s literary style with the following: “The source of virtue in Steinbeck’s ethics lies in his development of the ideas so as to explain … man’s capacity to judge his own actions and especially of his sense of duty” (77). Li’s assessment is succinctly indicative of Ethan in *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Ethan indeed understands his duty to be responsible for the choices he has made in betraying Danny Taylor and Mr. Marullo. Ditsky states, “In the end, there is very little that Steinbeck/Hawley does not seem to have accused himself of in the name of a broader context, including lust and indirect murder” (“Capacity” 174). In spite of Ethan’s evil socioeconomic course of greed taken, a slim saving (or redemptive) grace is that Ethan does not deny, refute, or ignore his full responsibility, thus adhering to his grandfather’s belief in self-discipline and self-responsibility. Another minute and slim saving (or redemptive) grace in the midst of Ethan’s evil actions against friend and supervisor is that Ethan never appropriates Mary’s money; he is always up front with taking it and receives Mary’s agreement even though he does not inform Mary how the money is used.

Another example of Ethan redeeming a situation occurs in Chapter Twenty-One of *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The chapter begins with Ethan’s customary deflection and avoidance, but the chapter concludes with Ethan truly asserting himself when confronting others. In the beginning of the chapter, Ethan briefly talks with Allen about school versus a supposed N.B.C. contract. Instead of confronting his child’s naïveté, Ethan departs from his child. Ethan shares, “I got out fast and closed the door and in my bathroom I ran the water cold and iced my skin and let the cold penetrate deep to control my shaking rage” (*Winter* 261). Steinbeck’s sentence gives the jolting perplexity of a father not confronting and truly expressing his pedagogical beliefs to his child. But then
at the conclusion of the chapter, Ethan enacts a reversal regarding confrontation. When Ethan learns from the N.B.C. representative of Dunscombe, Brock and Schwin that Allen has plagiarized, Ethan’s respectable conduct and morality affirm themselves with vehemence and seriousness. The representative offers Ethan money to keep the matter secret and states, “We could work something out. Scholarship or like that – something dignified” (Steinbeck, Winter 272). Ethan responds, “Has sin gone on strike for a wage raise? No, just go away now – please!” (Steinbeck, Winter 272). Ethan’s morality is taking precedence in his life again. He will not greedily make a profit from his child’s academic crime. Ethan has drawn the line on how far his greed for monetary achievement will go. Ethan rebukes using his child for socioeconomic gain. Ethan’s succinct retort encompasses an analysis of morality’s redemptive relation to socioeconomic propositions.

Ethan’s stern and truthful voice is finally asserted when confronting the N.B.C. representative. Ditsky has keenly discovered the following about Steinbeck’s writing style: “That one act in an affirmative manner became a moral imperative for Steinbeck, much of his later work attempting to prove the necessity for such action” (“Winter” 50). Steinbeck’s inclusion of the verbal exchange between Ethan and the N.B.C. representative is the novel’s pivotal “affirmative act” because Ethan finally states his “moral imperative” with another in society.

Steinbeck’s novel, though, diverges from Shakespeare’s play regarding socioeconomically profiting from one’s own child. Ethan’s parental actions regarding his child Allen’s life severely contrasts Queen Elizabeth’s parental actions regarding her child Elizabeth’s life in The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. Ethan’s strong ethics
emerge when confronted with Allen’s academic crime of plagiarism. But in contrast, though, when Queen Elizabeth contemplates Richard III’s offer to make her Queen Mother if he can marry her daughter (in 4.4 of the play), she ponders and deliberates, “Shall I forget myself to be myself?” (Shakespeare, Norton 613). Queen Elizabeth does indeed become subdued and manipulated by Richard’s offer, and she then decides to sacrifice her child for her own socioeconomic greed. When alone, Richard analyzes Elizabeth’s decision: “Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman” (Shakespeare, Norton 614). Even though Richard III is evil, Shakespeare has given Richard a moral, philosophical, and admirable line to describe Elizabeth’s low ethical conduct. Ethan, though, will not sacrifice his child’s future; Ethan’s acceptance of the money would convey to Allen that he has still been rewarded for his academic crime. Meyer states, “When Ethan must come to terms with his own son’s lack of ethics and his plagiarism in the ‘I love America’ contest, he begins to recognize that unless action is taken, the sins of the father will be visited upon the children” (“Citizen” 207). Also, George argues that one of the components of Ethan’s “loss of integrity” is “his belief in extreme moral relativity” (“Philosophical” 273). Ethan’s previous “extreme” immorality against Danny Taylor and Mr. Marullo adheres to Queen Elizabeth’s assessment to “forget myself to be myself” (Shakespeare, Norton 613), but Ethan does not “forget himself” regarding his child Allen’s life. Ethan does not enact “extreme moral relativity” (George, “Philosophical” 273) regarding Allen’s unquestionably clear-cut mistake. Ethan’s refusal of money from the representative subtly conveys that Ethan has reached his limit of greed; he ethically, and without second thought, stops himself from seeking more. Ethan has not furthered himself in greed by using his child’s mistake of plagiarism to get more money. Ethan is
therefore announcing parental morality as priority versus socioeconomic gain.

Shakespeare’s play presents a parent who sacrifices her child for socioeconomic gain, but Steinbeck inverts this action, creating a duality with the play because Ethan will not sacrifice his child.

Ethan is confronted with the reality of a hardship: his child’s plagiarism. Steinbeck gives Ethan the chance to redeem the situation; rather than accept a proposition to profit from his child’s plagiarism, Ethan immediately rejects further dishonesty. The “hardship versus redemption” duality is evident in this scene of the novel; furthermore, an ambiguity in this duality does not exist because Ethan does not enact dual attitudes and actions regarding plagiarism. Here, Steinbeck asserts Ethan’s strict adherence to a profound belief. Hart observes, “The philosophical naturalism embodied in Steinbeck’s early and best fiction reflects an understanding of and faith in both nature and man” (51). Hart’s commentary can also be applied to *The Winter of Our Discontent* because Steinbeck presents Ethan’s admirable conduct toward the N.B.C. representative. Steinbeck indeed has given faith in his character Ethan so that Ethan’s ethics and abhorrence regarding plagiarism are directly evident.

Ethan’s rejection of the N.B.C. representative’s monetary proposition indicates ethical conduct, contrasting his evil and cunning actions against Danny and Mr. Marullo. George analyzes Ethan’s predicament before his evil actions. George writes that Ethan “is unable to assess his worth on more important aspects of his life, such as his adherence to moral principles, his fidelity to his wife, and his example to his children and the community” (“Disintegration” 174). Ironically, while Ethan is in the midst of his own evil machinations, he tries to teach his children ethics. Ethan’s strongest words of
confrontation to his children occur at the beginning of Part Two in Chapter Eleven. When discussing plagiarism, Ethan questions Allen, “Can you honestly love a dishonest thing?” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 169). The dichotomy is that Ethan wants urgently to teach his children to be virtuous, but he has recently compromised his virtue. Ethan’s powerful rhetorical question to his child asserts his stance directly rather than deflecting or being flippant, which Ethan predominantly projects. Ethan is “unable to assess his worth” (George, “Disintegration” 174) through virtue, yet later he tries to teach his children about the utmost respectability of virtue via honesty.

The topic of false writing in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is also found in Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. Allen enters a writing contest with plagiarized words, creating falseness. In Shakespeare’s play, the character named Scrivener becomes a liar with his false writing regarding Hastings’s death. In 3.6 of the play, the Scrivener makes his/her only appearance with fourteen lines of dialogue; the Scrivener is also the only character in this scene. The Scrivener’s soliloquy contains the following two concluding lines: Bad is the world, and all will come to naught, / When such ill dealing must be seen in thought (Shakespeare, *Norton* 593). The editors translate the last line with the following: “3 Must be perceived but not spoken of” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 593). Shakespeare’s last two lines of 3.6 exactly describe Allen’s predicament because the N.B.C. representative wants to keep Allen’s plagiarism from becoming public. Shakespeare’s last line of 3.6 also pertains to the judges who do not catch Allen’s plagiarism until receiving Ellen’s postcard. Ellen’s action answers the Scrivener’s philosophy of inaction leading to badness when people remain inactive against falseness. The Scrivener speaks of fake, untruthful writing, which is therefore
corrupt writing; this is similar to Ethan Allen Hawley II’s plagiarized writing, which is also corrupt writing.

John Steinbeck includes Old Cap’n’s and Aunt Deborah’s pedagogical lessons as redemption because their lessons affect Ethan’s conscience. Ethan’s initial lack of serious pedagogy to his children asserts itself by the conclusion of The Winter of Our Discontent.

The change from lackadaisical to committed pedagogue is one example of redemption Ethan Allen Hawley attains. In addition, Steinbeck never wavers in his presentation of Ethan’s views about plagiarism; Ethan’s abhorrence to plagiarism is consistent throughout the novel.
CHAPTER VI
ENCOUNTERS WITH DANNY TAYLOR

Steinbeck’s presentation of Danny Taylor in *The Winter of Our Discontent* exemplifies the “hardship versus redemption” duality of the novel. Steinbeck not only gives Ethan the chance at redemption by his association with Danny, but Danny too gets the chance at his own redemption through his association with Ethan. Although Danny dies via his addiction to alcohol (accelerated by Ethan’s duplicitous gift of $1,000.00), Steinbeck does not destroy Danny’s humanity. Before his death, Danny gives his land as a gift to Ethan and his family, thereby redeeming his own life. Danny dies having just given a gift of hope onto another with love and compassion. Danny’s death is poignant and heartbreaking, but he departs life having gained redemption. Steinbeck’s presentation of Ethan’s relationship with Danny also alludes to two stories from the Bible.

Ethan and Danny have two face-to-face encounters in the novel, one on Good Friday and one on Easter Sunday. Ethan and Danny may initially seem to be alike in regards to having difficulties in confrontation, but Danny proves to be up front and confrontational with Ethan. Danny’s most evident form of non-confrontation is his use of
alcohol to obliterate reality, if only temporarily. During their Good Friday meeting, Danny criticizes Ethan’s occupation, but Danny does not allow a rebuttal from Ethan. Rather, he physically averts his eyes. Steinbeck writes, “He turned around and put his head in the corner of the closed doorway like a child who abolishes the world by looking away from it” (Winter 49). Here, Danny is street smart and assesses his world, yet he is just on the cusp of confrontation. Indicative of Danny’s lack of follow-through, Steinbeck gives background information about Danny’s life in the Naval Academy: “Three years with honors and then expelled. It killed his parents, they say, and it killed most of Danny” (Steinbeck, Winter 41). Steinbeck does not explain the reason for Danny’s expulsion. Perhaps alcohol led to Danny’s expulsion, or his expulsion led to his alcoholism. The reason is moot; rather Steinbeck presents this detail to describe a character who heretofore has not followed through in socioeconomic society and confrontation. But later in the novel, Danny’s ability to honor his business deal with Ethan proves that just before his death, Danny has confronted reality and enacted conduct producing socioeconomic success, albeit due to his friend’s greed. Danny makes sure his will is legitimate; in doing this, he respects his friend Ethan’s proposition and also asserts his ethics.

In Chapter Eight, Steinbeck presents Mr. Baker’s visit to Danny as background information during Danny’s conversation with Ethan in their Easter Sunday encounter. Ethan asks Danny, “It was Baker brought the bottle, wasn’t it?” (Steinbeck, Winter 117) Then Ethan states, “He wanted you to sign something” (Steinbeck, Winter 117). Steinbeck then writes the following about Danny’s response: “‘Yes, but I passed out.’ He chuckled to himself” (Winter 117). Next, when Danny initiates another face-to-face
encounter with Ethan for Easter Wednesday, Ethan agrees to this meeting. Danny Taylor proves to be confrontational because he initiates meeting again with Ethan on Easter Wednesday in order to receive the $1,000.00. Danny asks Ethan to meet on Wednesday, and Ethan verbally affirms, “Yes” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). Danny’s parting words to Ethan during their second meeting are the following: “See you Wednesday, Eth” (Steinbeck, Winter 120-21). Ethan seemingly honors this agreement, but he realizes Danny will not see him. Ethan reflects in Chapter Nine, “His shack was empty but I knew as surely as if I saw him that Danny was lying hidden in the weeds” (Steinbeck, Winter 147). Ethan gives Danny the money but not face-to-face. Ethan may seem to be the friend who is confrontational, but he is not. Rather, Ethan dishonors the agreement to meet on Wednesday because Ethan makes his visit to Danny’s shack on Easter Monday. Ethan’s evil machinations are indicative in this scene; Ethan’s impatient greed is in full effect.

Having learned earlier in the day from Chief Stoney about witnessing Danny’s signature on paperwork, Ethan disregards his verbal agreement with Danny and shows up two days sooner. Danny, thus, has the knowledge that his friend has not followed through on their Easter Sunday agreement. Steinbeck does not provide any narrative regarding Ethan’s decision to give Danny the money sooner than agreed upon. Furthermore, Danny reciprocates Ethan’s conduct by placing his will in the grocery store, lacking face-to-face confrontation. Ethan relays, “When I opened the alley door I saw the brown bank envelope that had been pushed under it” (Steinbeck, Winter 157). Danny’s actions in both of these scenes are assertions of loyalty. In spite of Ethan’s impatience, Danny still honors the socioeconomic deal, albeit with Ethan’s disregard to their verbal agreement of meeting again on Easter Wednesday.
Mr. Baker’s visit and then Ethan’s visit to Danny and their greed for his property allude to a Biblical story. Both Ethan and Mr. Baker are slyly seeking Danny’s property and are duplicitously altruistic with their gifts to him. Ray states the following about Steinbeck: “St. Paul’s Episcopal Church … played an important role in the early formation of the writer, who remained an Episcopalian throughout his life” (118-19). Ray also states that *The Winter of Our Discontent* is “the author’s most explicitly Episcopal work” (132). According to the Episcopalian website article “The Lessons Appointed for Use on Wednesday in Easter Week All Years,” the Easter Wednesday Biblical story in Acts 3:1-10 contains the following:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms … Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. *(Lectionarypage.net).*

Danny’s association with Ethan and Mr. Baker twists this Biblical story from Act 3:1-10. Danny too receives alms from Ethan and Mr. Baker, but as opposed to Peter and John who act righteously, selflessly, and humanely toward the lame man, Ethan’s conduct and Mr. Baker’s conduct toward Danny hide their selfishness and inhumanity.

Furthermore, Steinbeck writes that Danny asks Ethan to meet again on Wednesday, which is Easter Wednesday, but Ethan never asks his friend why this day was chosen, and Steinbeck does not write anymore about Danny’s chosen day. Also, the
Biblical story mentions the lame man’s feet and ankles, similar to Steinbeck’s description of Danny’s weak legs. An example from Chapter Three of the novel is the following: “The clean frost was scarred with long foot-dragged tracks” (Steinbeck, Winter 40).

Steinbeck is using a vivid description about nature to explain Danny’s difficult physical predicament instead of using another narrative technique. Steinbeck does not state if Danny’s drunkenness causes his particular footprints or if there is another reason.

Another example occurs in Chapter Fourteen. Steinbeck writes the following two-sentence paragraph: “No need to visit Danny’s shack in hope. The light had come enough to see the grasses standing upright in the path where Danny’s feet had stumbled them flat” (Steinbeck, Winter 202). The lame man gets strength from faith and from Peter’s and John’s pious alms, but Danny loses strength and is destroyed by accepting Ethan’s deceitful gift. Ironically, as the lame man is the one who receives alms in the Biblical story, Danny, who heretofore received gifts from Ethan and Mr. Baker, becomes the one who selflessly and righteously gives alms to Ethan. In addition, this scene alludes to The Tragedy of King Richard the Third because Danny’s socioeconomic alms, i.e. his will, to Ethan are not frivolous or “Airy recorders of intestate joys” (Shakespeare, Norton 607). Danny is bequeathing serious socioeconomic alms to not only Ethan but to Ethan’s family as well. Dualism is conveyed in Danny’s encounters with Ethan because Danny is bequeathing his gift in good faith, whereas Ethan’s gift is given with duplicity.

Steinbeck’s allusion to Acts 3:1-10 of the Bible contained in The Winter of Our Discontent aligns with Lisca’s analysis of “a sequence of events which, although obviously parallel to Christ’s Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, constitute ironic inversions of them” (177). The combination of Danny’s life predicament and his request
to meet on Easter Wednesday conveys a very subtle allusion to Christianity, and specifically Steinbeck’s Episcopalian faith. This Easter Wednesday allusion adheres to Lisca’s commentary of Steinbeck’s “ironic inversions” (177) of Christian ideas.

Ethan’s delivery of his $1,000.00 gift of money on Easter Monday also alludes to Steinbeck’s Episcopalian faith. Ray states the following about Steinbeck: “Echoes of the King James Bible and the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer are audible in many of the most poetic passages of his finished work as well” (119). The section entitled “The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels” within The Book of Common Prayer (90-269) presents the Easter Monday readings (166-68). “The Collect” includes, “Open, we pray thee, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold thee in all thy works” (Book 166). “The Gospel St. Luke xxiv. 13” (Book 167-68) includes, “While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near” (Book 167); also, this section includes the following about the Lord: “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him” (Book 168). Once again, Lisca’s commentary about “ironic inversions” (177) of Christian ideas is exemplified here. Danny and Ethan do not commune together on Easter Monday, and on this day Ethan’s eyes never meet Danny’s eyes. The face-to-face confrontation which is apparent in the Easter Monday readings of The Book of Common Prayer is missing in Steinbeck’s Easter Monday scene with Danny and Ethan.

Furthermore, in Chapter Eight, Steinbeck juxtaposes the scene of non-confrontation between Ethan and Danny (concerning the gift of money being delivered on Easter Monday) versus a scene of direct confrontation. Ethan observes, “I found my Mary in the eye of a storm” (Steinbeck, Winter 147). Whereas the previous scene presents a seeming lack of confrontation, Mary is presented as strong and confrontational.
In the second-last chapter of the novel, Margie Young-Hunt states the following to Ethan about Mary: “Helpless? She’s tough as a boot. She’ll go right on long after you’ve rattled your engine to pieces” (Steinbeck, Winter 266). Steinbeck gives a feministic interpretation to Mary’s character. Steinbeck also gives Mary the intelligence and bold voice to deduce that a great amount of money would be detrimental to Danny. In front of the Bakers on Easter Sunday, Mary voices her vehemence to Ethan. Steinbeck writes the following: “‘No one would dare do that,’ Mary cried. ‘That would be after killing him’” (Steinbeck, Winter 106). In Chapter Seven, Mary voices her conscience and rationale against Ethan’s stated wish to give Danny money. In Chapter Eight, Danny is similar to Mary in that he too expresses, “And you’re betting a thousand dollars’ worth of booze will kill me” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). Both Mary and Danny confront and voice the brutal reality of the gift of money, whereas Ethan never acknowledges this to others or himself.

Steinbeck’s decision to write of Ethan’s early visit to Danny’s home on Easter Monday remains a mystery. Also mysterious is why Danny requests to meet with Ethan on Easter Wednesday. These two scenes exemplify Pierre Macherey’s statement: “In the book, then, not everything is said, and for everything to be said we must await the critical ‘explicit’, which may actually be interminable” (704). Steinbeck has created a major dilemma for scholars to ascertain the reasoning for Ethan’s early visit and Danny’s requested meeting day.

Ethan’s encounters with Danny in the novel are poignant and difficult for Ethan, and upon learning of Danny’s death, Ethan withdraws in the grocery store to be alone. Steinbeck subtly presents Ethan’s humanity because he is alone and withdrawn from
society to acknowledge his friend’s death. Steinbeck does not allow Ethan to casually resume his day. The hardship of Danny’s death gives Ethan the chance to be alone with this knowledge, a very subtle form of redemption that asserts Ethan’s humanity toward his friend.

Furthermore, Ethan and Danny’s relationship in *The Winter of Our Discontent* exemplifies the “hardship versus redemption” duality. Steinbeck’s allusion to “The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels” within *The Book of Common Prayer* initially conveys hardship between Ethan and Danny, but Danny’s commitment to honor their business agreement redeems the situation even though they never meet face-to-face again. Steinbeck’s allusion to Acts 3:1-10 of the Bible conveys redemption because Danny acts nobly while giving his alms to Ethan. Steinbeck alludes to Christian ideas in the relationship between Ethan and Danny.
CHAPTER VII
ENCOUNTERS WITH RICHARD WALDER

Steinbeck presents Richard Walder in Ethan Allen Hawley’s life as redemption. Richard’s profound words that he relays from Mr. Marullo give Ethan the chance to make positive meaning out of his own heretofore actions. Hence, this signifies a “hardship versus redemption” duality. Also, Richard’s admirable conduct gives Ethan the opportunity to realize an honest and moral person can achieve socioeconomic success in life. A “hardship versus redemption” duality exists in Ethan’s relationship with Richard Walder. Ethan realizes his own socioeconomic advancement is due to causing hardships onto others (Mr. Marullo and Danny), but then Ethan realizes by observing Richard Walder that socioeconomic success can be attained through noble means.

The last chapter of The Winter of Our Discontent presents Ethan’s commentary of individuals’ lights (i.e. moral goodness) shining, and Ethan’s light metaphor is greatly influenced by Richard Walder. Richard first uses the light metaphor as translation for Mr. Marullo’s commentary about Ethan. In Chapter Fifteen, Ethan and Richard have their second (and also) final conversation together. Richard informs Ethan that Mr. Marullo
has bequeathed to him the store. Richard states, “I promised Marullo I’d come out here. He wants to give you the store” (Steinbeck, Winter 224). Even though Ethan learns Richard’s reason for his visit to the grocery store, Ethan asks Richard, “Why did you drive out here?” (Steinbeck, Winter 226). Richard then answers, “Don’t know exactly. Had to – maybe – so the light won’t go out” (Steinbeck, Winter 226). Before Ethan’s question, Richard explains the following about Mr. Marullo: “I’m trying to translate what he tried to explain” (Steinbeck, Winter 225-26). Thus, Richard has analyzed Mr. Marullo’s heartfelt intentions and has then inserted his philosophical translation of them.

Later in Chapter Sixteen, Ethan reflects upon Richard’s commentary. Steinbeck writes, “So the light won’t go out. Did Alfio say it that way? Walder didn’t know, but he did know that’s what Marullo meant” (Winter 229). Richard has kept his promise to Mr. Marullo to deliver the news about his bequest of the store to Ethan and to also speak on behalf of Mr. Marullo. Richard’s translated words of wisdom are somewhat mysterious and ambiguous. Richard seemingly includes additional wisdom. Steinbeck does not inform readers if Mr. Marullo is the guaranteed initial agent or authority of this phrase: “so the light won’t go out” (Steinbeck, Winter 226). But Walder may be the agent. Miller writes, “Steinbeck’s choices about what we are allowed to know about each character, especially Ethan, provide ambiguity and complexity as we strive to understand Ethan’s moral decline” (16). Macherey’s statement is applicable here also: “In the book, then, not everything is said, and for everything to be said we must await the critical ‘explicit’, which may actually be interminable” (704). Ethan is examining the agent/authority/inventor of this phrase. Walder’s care with words asserts that he is continually honest and moral, and thus would not steal someone else’s words or ideas;
Walder even acknowledges (or cites) being a translator for Mr. Marullo. Richard thus is not a plagiarist; Walder believes in giving attribution. Richard’s respect for the invention of ideas is analogous to Ethan’s respect for the invention of ideas. Richard Walder’s presence in Ethan’s life is brief, yet Richard’s words carry power and influence upon Ethan in the final scene of *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Richard Walder is a successful person in socioeconomic society and a successful person in ethical society. Hayashi writes, “Ethan, the hero, makes a gallant but unsuccessful effort to remain pure in such a polluted environment” (110). But Richard is pure with his understanding of the “polluted environment,” consisting of duplicity and chicanery. Richard tells Ethan, “If you get conditioned by crooks and liars and cheats, why, an honest man can shock the hell out of you” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 224). Richard’s presence in Ethan’s life is as a trusted brother figure. In their second meeting, Richard helps Ethan in the grocery store without being asked. Steinbeck writes, “He reached in front of me to ring up cash on the register” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 223). Ethan does not stop Richard, a stranger, from working at the cash register, signifying Ethan’s trust of Richard. Next Ethan expresses, “My subcutaneous fear of a cop dissipated when Walder weighed out a pound of tomatoes and totted up a list of figures on a bag” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 224). Richard is loyal in that he keeps his promise to Mr. Marullo and tells Ethan of his inheritance of the grocery store. Richard’s journey to New Baytown to deliver this news is on his own time – not work time, i.e. paid socioeconomic time. Rather, Richard’s act of travel to Ethan is altruistic, which is void of any socioeconomic gain for himself. Ironically, Richard’s visit may create a workplace (socioeconomic) violation because Richard states that he is “not even sure the department would approve” (Steinbeck,
Winter 222) of this visit, but Richard’s visit does not create an ethical violation. Furthermore, the travel to New Baytown has taken Richard “three hours from New York and I’ve got to drive three hours back in holiday traffic” (Steinbeck, Winter 223). Richard’s presentation in *The Winter of Our Discontent* is not lengthy, but Steinbeck has provided depth and detail to this character. Richard Walder is observant, loyal, and resolute in his pure stance while he is also appropriately sceptical.

Richard Walder serves as hopeful inspiration that a person can be successful at both socioeconomics and ethics even though so many characters in *The Winter of Our Discontent* are presented as only one or the other. In “Citizen Cain: Ethan Hawley’s Double Identity in *The Winter of Our Discontent*,” Meyer states, “Given Steinbeck’s previous preoccupation with the Cain and Abel myth in *East of Eden* … it should not be surprising that this particular myth resurfaces for one last examination in *The Winter of Our Discontent*” (198). In the same source, Meyer then writes, “Up to the time the novel begins, Ethan has served as an Abel, a passive victim whose fortunes have fallen as more aggressive Cains have asserted their claims on society … It is becoming increasingly clear to Ethan that maintaining an Abel role will bring him neither happiness nor success” (200). Specifically, Meyer equates the Abel role with Ethan’s heretofore “mild-mannered ethical actions” (200). But Steinbeck gives readers an admirable character in Richard Walder who encompasses all-around success while he acts honorably in socioeconomic society. Seeing Richard’s life shows Ethan honorable people can and do succeed in socioeconomic society. By meeting Richard Walder, Ethan experiences a “hardship versus redemption” dualism in that Ethan realizes the possibility of honorable socioeconomic success versus the heretofore dishonorable successes he has witnessed.
and himself experienced. Meyer also assesses the Abel role positively with the following: “Ethan’s reaction to his son’s plagiarism and to Marullo’s misplaced confidence offers hope that he will return to his former Abel state” (“Citizen” 208). Meyer’s statement is an assertion of Ethan’s gift or chance at redemption. Steinbeck indirectly asserts Richard Walder’s successful “Abel” life upon Ethan because Ethan intently analyzes Richard’s words of wisdom after their second meeting. Steinbeck has also named this admirable character Richard whose conduct is in utmost contrast to Shakespeare’s villain named Richard III. Richard Walder from *The Winter of Our Discontent* is altruistic and becomes a replacement brother in Ethan Hawley’s life by replacing Danny Taylor.

In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan experiences socioeconomic hardships, and he conceives a dismal view of obtaining socioeconomic success. But then Steinbeck inserts Richard Walder into Ethan’s life. Ethan’s newfound unethical actions result in moral hardships, yet Ethan’s unethical actions are countered by the redemptive actions of Richard Walder. Ethan is witness to Richard’s honorable socioeconomic success, which serves as inspiration and hope for Ethan to redeem himself.
CHAPTER VIII
MORE BROTHERLY ENCOUNTERS

_The Winter of Our Discontent_ presents many examples of being a brother’s keeper. Steinbeck gives characters the chance to act as a brother’s keeper. Redemption, thereby, is achieved when these characters nobly help one another. Steinbeck presents multiple characters who, while encountering a hardship, act as a brother’s keeper in the novel: Ethan Allen Hawley, Danny Taylor, Chief Stoney, Richard Walder, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Marullo. Therefore, a “hardship versus redemption” duality is asserted because characters help each other by redeeming situations in spite of hardships.

Steinbeck first writes about a brother’s keeper in Chapter Three, the same chapter that introduces Old Cap’n Hawley and the Place. Even before Ethan shatters his virtuous conduct and betrays Danny, Ethan agonizes that he has not helped his friend Danny. Ethan assesses, “Maybe my guilt comes because I am my brother’s keeper and I have not saved him” (Steinbeck, _Winter_ 41). Yet ironically, Ethan chastises himself, but up to this moment Ethan has never betrayed or hurt his friend. Later, in Chapter Seven, Ethan expresses his feelings about Danny to Mr. Baker. Ethan says, “I feel I should be my brother Danny’s keeper” (Steinbeck, _Winter_ 106). Steinbeck’s use of the term “brother’s
keeper” in the novel conveys responsibility and honor. Ethan’s conversation here is one of his rare moments in the novel that he is truthful, honorable, and direct with others.

In Chapter Eight of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Danny acts as a brother’s keeper to Ethan. In their second (and also) final face-to-face confrontation, Danny explains to Ethan that he knows the truth about the gift of money. When Danny states, “You’re betting that a thousand dollars’ worth of booze will kill me, and there you’ll be with an airport in your lap,” Ethan responds, “That’s a nasty thing, Danny” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 120). In this scene, Danny is morally acting as his brother’s keeper toward Ethan. He confronts Ethan’s motives and voices them back to his friend who is lacking confrontation (and living in denial). Danny gives his assessment of his friend’s behavior, stating, “You’re the kid with the built-in judge” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 120). Danny’s comment is subtle and altruistic persuasion, hoping for Ethan’s continuance of ethics. Danny confronts Ethan’s plan of subterfuge, and in spite of Ethan’s villainy, Danny maintains love and loyalty to his friend. Danny’s parting words are, “My house is your house. I’m going out. See you Wednesday, Eth” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 120-21).

Materialistically, Danny’s house – the property that once contained Danny’s house – does become Ethan’s “house.” Morally and ethically, Danny’s statement expresses that he still acknowledges Ethan as his friend. Steinbeck’s visual description of Danny leaving his tent is not seemingly dignified since Danny’s “pants were not zipped up” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 121). But this visual detail is subordinated to the moral dignity and grace Danny shows when he leaves his friend.

In this scene, Steinbeck gives grand dignity and honor in the portrayal of Danny Taylor. Susan Shillinglaw writes the following about Steinbeck: “But his is never the
language of despair but of empathy” (84). Shillinglaw also writes of Steinbeck, “He embraces the fullness of life. With compassion, tolerance, and humility, he surveys landscapes – of place, of spirit, of a nation” (86). This altruistic scene between Danny Taylor and Ethan Hawley is indicative of Shillinglaw’s commentary. Danny is full of empathy, compassion, and tolerance toward his erring friend. Danny understands the hardship of this encounter, but he is seeking ways to redeem the situation through his empathy.

Chief Stoney acts as a brother’s keeper for Danny by witnessing Danny’s signature on paperwork, which is his will. In Chapter Nine, Chief Stoney relates this encounter with Danny to Ethan. When Ethan questions Chief Stoney, he responds, “I don’t know. Had two papers but turned back so I couldn’t see” (Steinbeck, Winter 135). At the conclusion of Part One (Chapter Ten), Steinbeck provides the clear answer with the following:

Three sheets of paper from a five-cent lined school pad, written on with a soft lead pencil. A will: “I, being in my right mind …” and “In consideration I …” A note of hand: “I agree to repay and pledge my …” Both papers signed, the writing neat and precise. “Dear Eth: This is what you want” (Winter 157).

Chief Stoney also informs Ethan of Danny’s appearance: “Had his hair cut and a necktie on” (Steinbeck, Winter 136). Ergo, Danny adheres with dignity toward producing a bona fide (and legal) will to Ethan, and he dresses professionally for this duty. Danny’s encounter with Chief Stoney is also poignant because Danny respects Ethan’s confidentiality in this business transaction. Danny could have easily exposed this business deal without any negative recriminations on his own life. Danny’s note to repay
Ethan the money is his self-dignified graciousness. Dorset states in 2.2 of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, “In common worldly things ‘tis called ungrateful / With dull unwillingness to pay a debt / Which with a bounteous hand was kindly lent” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 575). In spite of Ethan’s loan that was not “kindly lent,” Danny conducts himself with courtesy, gratefulness, and professionalism by producing a promissory note. Again, Danny is acting as his brother’s keeper toward Ethan.

Richard Walder also fulfills the admirable role of brother’s keeper to Ethan Hawley. Danny’s spiritual presence in Ethan’s life tries to save him from robbing the bank, whereas Richard’s tangible presence saves Ethan from robbing the bank. Chapter Fourteen concludes with Ethan’s verbal outburst: “Danny – Danny! Get out of my guts” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 218). Hence, this is foreshadowing Danny’s death. Ethan’s conscience is in full force trying to avert the bank robbery. In the next chapter, Chapter Fifteen, Ethan meets again with Richard. Ethan’s impending plan to rob Mr. Baker’s bank is stopped by Richard’s split-second arrival at the grocery store. Ditsky writes of Richard, “The chance arrival of a man from ‘Justice’ acts as a saving *deus ex machina* in the matter of the intended bank robbery” (“Winter” 46). Richard inadvertently acts as a “brother’s keeper” to Ethan, stopping a robbery that would have ended in Ethan getting caught. Ergo, one brother’s death is replaced by a new brother.

In Chapter Sixteen, Ethan realizes, “I wondered what my payment would be and when demanded” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 229). This pivotal statement in *The Winter of Our Discontent* stresses Ethan’s conscience once again fighting for prominence in his life. In 2.3 of *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, the Third Citizen states, “Untimely storms make men expect a dearth” (Shakespeare, *Norton* 577). Hence, Richard Walder’s
untimely presence and his statements in Ethan’s life are “storms” inducing Ethan’s confrontation of his previous business transactions against Danny and Mr. Marullo. The former ease of his greedy conduct is now being righteously bullied by his fervid and moral analysis. Ethan’s payment is a not a socioeconomic (monetary) payment but a moral payment of remorse and anguish because his socioeconomic success has caused the destruction of other lives. Ethan has the knowledge that he once had the priceless worth of morality and the priceless worth of people’s trust.

Mr. Baker too acts as a brother’s keeper to Ethan throughout The Winter of Our Discontent. In their last scene together in the novel, Mr. Baker expresses to Ethan Hawley his own interpretation of Danny Taylor’s act of giving alms, i.e. bequeathing his property to Ethan. Mr. Baker’s realization of Ethan’s newfound socioeconomic success induces his own moral analysis regarding the business deal between the two friends. Mr. Baker confronts Ethan with the idea that Danny’s acceptance of Ethan’s offer is not gracious and friendly but hateful. Mr. Baker relates to Ethan, “Maybe he hated you. Maybe his trick was the disintegration of a man” (Steinbeck, Winter 258). Mr. Baker, albeit cunning and evil, understands the conduct of Ethan who heretofore has led a moral and honorable life. As Richard Walder expressed that he knew the conduct of “crooks and liars and cheats” (Steinbeck, Winter 224), readers can easily infer that Mr. Baker’s own experiences have led him to understand the cunning machinations and hidden agendas of others. Mr. Baker reasons to Ethan that Danny knew Ethan would not be happy with the socioeconomic deal in the long run and that Ethan instead would morally suffer regarding his corrupt, greedy ways. Li writes, “It seems that in Steinbeck’s ethical frame, excessive seizure of land, be it for individual or corporate purposes, makes human
beings nature’s enemy and causes individual and national calamities” (69). Thus, Mr. Baker foretells of Ethan’s future agony while his statements to Ethan regarding Danny’s intentions may be purposefully false. Mr. Baker is perhaps using leverage to retaliate against Ethan’s checkmate in obtaining Danny’s property. Furthermore, Mr. Baker has presented a duality to Ethan: Danny’s seemingly heartfelt gift to Ethan that now has a dual meaning/intent.

Danny’s conversation with Ethan regarding their pending business deal supports Mr. Baker’s hypothesis, but Danny’s actions strongly refute Mr. Baker’s hypothesis. Danny explains his side of the business transaction to Ethan; Danny states, “I have no loyalty, no fairness. What you’ll get is nothing but hearty laughter” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). Danny’s explanatory bequest of “hearty laughter” is correlative to Queen Elizabeth’s analysis of “Airy recorders of intestate joys” (Shakespeare, Norton 607) from The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. But Danny’s behavior throughout the business deal contrasts his statement of “hearty laughter” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). This is exemplified by Danny dressing in a professional and dignified manner when seeking a witness to his signature on the will, which contrasts Ethan’s last sight of Danny whose “pants were not zipped up” (Steinbeck, Winter 121). Danny’s parting words to Ethan include, “My house is your house” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). Danny’s statement is a simple and succinct statement that connotes sharing and brotherhood. Danny’s statement also parallels Peter’s response to the lame man in Acts 3:1-10: “What I have I give you” (Lectionarypage.net). Furthermore, after Danny offers to share his home and departs from Ethan, Ethan hears Danny: “From a distance I heard him singing in a clear, high falsetto” (Steinbeck, Winter 121). Steinbeck then presents four lines which are from “The
“Skye Boat Song” by Sir Harold Boulton (Wikipedia.org). Whereas Ethan sings and therefore twists Shakespeare’s two serious lines from *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, Danny does not twist or manipulate Boulton’s words to accommodate his machinations because Danny is not enacting with duplicity. Danny’s lifelong friendship with Ethan enforces that his bequest is serious, true, and pious as opposed to frivolous and superficial.

Steinbeck presents an additional ethical agony in Ethan’s life. Ethan never expresses this anguish via his “interior monologue” (Lisca 182), making it an indirect and subtly presented anguish. Meyer states that Ethan has the choice “whether to obey a moral code despite the seemingly arbitrary lack of recognition he receives for such an action” (“Citizen” 202). Also, Hayashi states the following about Ethan: “His sense of moral anonymity and reduced status seems to invite the obvious temptations and denunciations” (108-109). Ironically, Ethan receives recognition for his ethical conduct after he enacts evil and duplicity. As stated previously, Danny comments upon Ethan’s “built-in judge” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 120) when Ethan offers duplicitous money to him. Mr. Marullo bequests his grocery store to Ethan “so the light won’t go out” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 226). Richard Walder refers to Ethan with the following: “Why, an honest man can shock the hell out of you” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 224). Mr. Baker also understands Ethan’s heretofore honesty and ethics by questioning Ethan’s business tactics to obtain Danny’s property. Mr. Baker asks the following two questions: “Did you know what you were doing, Ethan?”; and, “Do you feel good about it?” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 258). Margie Young-Hunt understands the strength of Ethan’s conscience because she states to Ethan about a proposed affair, “You might turn honest” (Steinbeck, *Winter* 267). In addition,
Ethan is trusted by many people in New Baytown who act as messengers, entrusting him with confidential information. At the conclusion of the novel, Ethan has the knowledge that his community always recognized his admirable and honest conduct even though he did not receive expressed adulation for it. Steinbeck leaves this bitter pang unmentioned in the text.

Steinbeck provides parallels between Danny Taylor and Richard Walder. These parallels subordinate their immediate differences; this then removes a dualism between them. In the novel, Ethan meets Danny on two separate occasions, and Ethan also meets Richard on two occasions. Steinbeck provides the following description of Richard that could also serve as description of Danny: “Fortyish, hard, tough, and devoted to whatever he was doing” (Steinbeck, Winter 177). Danny is devoted to honoring his business deal with Ethan. Danny is also devoted and tough in his conversation with Ethan while making their business deal, especially with the following: “You’re the kid with the built-in judge” (Steinbeck, Winter 120). Danny still acknowledges Ethan with brotherly love. Also, Steinbeck provides the visual details of Danny’s pants “not zipped up” (Winter 121) and Richard’s “Ivy League pants” (Winter 177). Ethan shares intimate experiences with his brothers Danny and Richard. When Chief Stoney needs to verify that the body found on Danny’s property is indeed him, Stoney asks Ethan if Danny had any “marks on him” (Steinbeck, Winter 254). Ethan informs Stoney of their heart tattoos they created with razor blades. Hence, Danny and Ethan had the ceremony of a blood brotherhood. Later, Ethan reveals his urgent problem of “Skitters” (Steinbeck, Winter 221) to Richard. Both of these acts reveal Ethan’s intimacy, bond, and trust with his brothers. Steinbeck presents a brotherly love between Ethan and Danny, who have known each other since
childhood, and a brotherly love between Ethan and Richard, who are only briefly in each other’s lives. In Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, King Edward IV asks (in 2.1), “Who spoke of brotherhood? Who spoke of love?” (Shakespeare, *Norton 573*). In *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Steinbeck’s two characters, Danny Taylor and Richard Walder, symbolically answer King Edward’s rhetorical question because they speak and act as brothers toward Ethan Allen Hawley. Steinbeck’s narrative technique of brotherly love in varying durations or timeframes asserts that true “brotherly love” can be attained between people even when they become “hard, tough” (Steinbeck, *Winter 177*).

Steinbeck directly presents Ethan’s views about being a brother’s keeper to Danny, but Steinbeck also presents subtle examples throughout *The Winter of Our Discontent* of characters acting in the role of a brother’s keeper. The above analyzed instances of these characters enacting humanity toward each other assert that they are redeeming themselves in the midst of a hardship.
Steinbeck directly presents the “hardship versus redemption” duality in the last chapter of *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The chapter begins with hardship but concludes with redemption as the more powerful force in Ethan’s life.

In the last chapter of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan observes and analyzes lights. The two-page last chapter of the novel is the briefest chapter in the novel, and it asserts nature’s redemption. (Steinbeck’s last chapter of the novel, being the shortest [two pages], contrasts the length of the first chapter [twenty-six pages], which is the longest chapter of the novel. This is according to the 1996 Penguin publication of the novel.) In *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer*, Benson presents Steinbeck’s letter of June 25, 1960 explicating *The Winter of Our Discontent*, which states the following: “It must finish with enormous speed and then an envoie like a sonnet. In fact this whole thing is conceived in the sonnet form. Shake – not Petrarchian, I mean the tone and sequence” (879). Benson describes the novel’s conclusion as “a kind of introspective lyricism that was reminiscent of the sonnets” (879). George describes the novel’s conclusion as “somewhat sudden and stilted” (“Disintegration” 179). Therefore,
Steinbeck provides an explanation to the brief two-page concluding chapter of the novel. Briefly then, Ethan’s new goal is helping to secure Ellen’s bright future.

The last chapter of The Winter of Our Discontent is a merging of socioeconomics with nature. The wallet in Ethan’s pocket loses its weight while in the sea, indicating the lessening of Ethan’s greed. Ergo, money is subordinated to nature’s power. Also, in the novel’s last chapter, Ethan observes, “The rain was only a thin mist now and it accumulated all the stars and town lamps and spread them evenly” (Steinbeck, Winter 275). This statement symbolizes Ethan’s acknowledgement of combining his public persona or socioeconomic life with his heretofore inner (and hidden) life. Prior to Ethan’s visit to the Place (in the last chapter), George writes, “Allen’s words reveal Ethan to himself” (“Disintegration” 178). Also, George writes, “In this dreadful epiphany, Ethan realizes the fundamental disparity between his personal and public selves” (“Disintegration” 178). Whereas Ethan had previously demarcated his solitary thoughts from others, this relation of stars (natural objects) with town lamps (socioeconomic constructs) is symbolic of Ethan’s direct confrontation with life, (finally) achieved by his verbal rebuke to the N.B.C. representative.

When Ethan states in the novel’s last chapter, “My light is out” (Steinbeck, Winter 275), this occurs while he assesses the moral lights of Mr. Marullo, Old Cap’n Hawley, and Aunt Deborah who continuously bequeath their kindness, humanity, and pedagogy through Ethan’s remembrance of them. Ethan’s belief that his light is out is rebuffed by nature because nature grants him the gift of light from the stars and town lamps, which exemplifies redemption. In contrast, Philbrick writes, “A rising tide has transformed what was a spot of quiet contemplation at the novel’s beginning into a
hostile and dangerous environment” (237). But in the article “Steinbeck on Man and Nature: A Philosophical Reflection,” Hart states the following: “One might be tempted to say that nature, poetically or spiritually rendered, is man’s true source, an authentic home, a kindly, albeit amoral, friend and nurturer that treats persons neutrally rather than cruelly” (46). Hart’s statement is applicable to Ethan’s experiences in nature.

Furthermore, Ethan reciprocates nature’s friendship because he does not want to ravage nature. In Chapter Eight when Ethan kills two rabbits, he feels “miserable in the stomach” (Steinbeck, Winter 115). In Chapter Twenty-Two of the novel, Steinbeck juxtaposes the hardships of socioeconomics with the subtle and kindly guidance and redemption found in nature.

Ethan’s ability to see starlight in Chapter Twenty-Two, though, is in contrast to Richard III’s inability to see sunlight in The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. On the day Richard III is to battle Henry, Earl of Richmond, Richard III asks, “Who saw the sun today?” (Shakespeare, Norton 625). When Ratcliffe states that he has not, Richard states, “The sun will not be seen today. / The sky doth frown and lour upon our army” (Shakespeare, Norton 625). Ethan surmises about his life, “My light is out” (Steinbeck, Winter 275), but he is wrong, for the starlight witnessed by Ethan symbolizes he will live.

Ditsky analyzes Ethan’s receipt of starlight earlier in the novel which is also applicable as analysis to Ethan’s receipt of starlight in the novel’s last scene. Ditsky states that a star “seems to augur Ethan’s recovery of dignity” (“Winter” 47). George assesses that Ethan’s decision to live for Ellen “indicates that Ethan’s own light may yet still flicker” (“Disintegration” 179). George’s statement asserts a chance at redemption. But Richard III’s light is indeed out; he dies in battle this day. Ethan’s gift of starlight symbolizes his
chance and then decision to keep living. In nature, Ethan discovers and is inspired by his belief that he wants Ellen to have the saving grace of life’s goodness. Once again, Steinbeck’s novel diverges from Shakespeare’s play, creating a duality. Steinbeck’s main character lives and has a chance at redemption while Shakespeare’s main character is killed and has no chance at gaining Earthly redemption.

An additional interpretation is conveyed in the novel regarding Steinbeck’s presentation of Ellen’s “light.” Ethan’s reliance and faith on his daughter’s “light” – or moral goodness - is indicative of feminism. Heavilin argues that Steinbeck’s use of “light” is another name for God (“Steinbeck’s” 94). Specifically, Heavilin lists other metonymic terms for God with the following statement: “Love, Joy, Truth, Goodness, Light, and Beauty are among God’s other names” (“Steinbeck’s” 94). Until the last chapter of The Winter of Our Discontent, Ethan has misunderstood his daughter’s character; she is indeed true and kindhearted. Prior to this realization of his child, Ethan is anti-feministic when he learns that Ellen enjoys reading Henry Clay. Ethan states, “Somehow it doesn’t seem schoolgirl reading” (Steinbeck, Winter 170). Ellen responds, “He’s just great” (Steinbeck, Winter 170). Instead of patiently conversing with Ellen about her statement, Steinbeck writes the following about Ethan: “Ethan got up from his chair with a whole long and weary day pushing him back” (Winter 171). Ethan’s commentary to Ellen occurs after Ethan argues with Allen about working in the grocery store. Ethan’s conversations with Allen and Ellen are each brief because Ethan does give time and patience with his children. Therefore, Ethan’s realization of Ellen’s true character of compassion and love is revealed in the last chapter of the novel. Previously, in Chapter Eight, Ethan expresses the following about Ellen: “I love her, but I am
somewhat in fear of her because I don’t understand her” (Steinbeck, Winter 125). In the novel’s last chapter, Ethan is strengthened by Ellen’s strength. Hence, Ethan decides to fight for his life to make sure his progeny – Ellen – has goodness in her life, which Philbrick describes as Ethan’s “final, truly altruistic act directed toward the future” (238). Ethan’s change from an anti-feministic father to a feminist father is subtly presented in the concluding chapter of The Winter of Our Discontent.

Ethan’s exegesis of his grandfather’s ethics instructs his own conduct because he does not blame anyone for his greedy and unethical decisions/actions. Also, regarding the final scene of the novel, Philbrick writes, “Ethan’s sudden determination to live is made possible by his realization that humanity’s only hope rests not with a group but with the individual” (237). Furthermore, George writes, “Steinbeck now views society’s redemption as dependent on the moral character of each person within that society, a philosophical shift that explains the preoccupation with moral integrity in this, his last novel” (“Disintegration” 180). George’s analysis astutely aligns with Old Cap’n’s philosophy. Because Ethan ponders upon and recognizes his grandfather’s high ethics while in the Place, the Place serves as a spiritual haven, a place where Ethan contemplates and remembers his grandfather’s sanctity. This passage provides an example of Old Cap’n Hawley’s nobility of mind in that he would never punish a descendent of Cap’n Baker, which would then lead to disgracing himself. This passage also serves as an example for the Place inducing humane and compassionate conduct.

Nature is the place where Ethan confronts the reality of his socioeconomic hardships and then finds redemptive hope. Ethan’s dismal view of life at the beginning of the last chapter is countered by his newfound goal/purpose at the conclusion of the
chapter. Even though Ethan has made disastrous decisions, Steinbeck does not allow his character to succumb to defeat. In *The Paris Review*, Steinbeck states, “It is the duty of the writer to lift up, to extend, to encourage” (Benchley 173). Steinbeck indeed fulfills this responsibility with Ethan’s inspiration attained in his last visit to the Place.
CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

_The Winter of Our Discontent_ powerfully presents the duality of economic greed countered with nature’s redemptive help and grace in Ethan’s life. This novel stresses the gift of teaching others that life is to be confronted with seriousness and ethics, not superficial frivolity and evil duplicity. The novel presents Ethan’s progression toward achieving serious respect and confrontation of life. In the last chapter of the novel (Chapter Twenty-Two), Ethan merges his comfort and solace in nature with the hardships in his socioeconomic life. These dual settings unite as do Ethan’s dual personalities. In the previous chapter (Chapter Twenty-One), Ethan finally achieves expression of his inner feelings and beliefs when confronting the N.B.C. representative. In this twenty-two-chaptered novel, Chapter Twenty-One is the pivotal chapter where Ethan finally with a truthful voice expresses his views in response to the hardships of his socioeconomic world. In this chapter, Ethan verbally expresses vehemence regarding an offer to profit from his child’s plagiarism. In the novel’s last chapter, nature is where Ethan experiences a saving grace, teaching him to live for his child Ellen. _The Winter of Our Discontent_ concludes with Ethan’s newfound sternness and confrontation which continue the
pedagogical lessons of seriousness, sternness, and honor learned from Old Cap’n Hawley, Aunt Deborah, Danny Taylor, and Richard Walder.

Steinbeck concludes *The Winter of Our Discontent* with the assertion of the redemptive hope of nature to induce strength; ergo, Ethan now has the direct and honest pursuit to confront the harsh realities of socioeconomic life. While the novel is predominantly filled with Ethan’s cunning machinations and joyful superficiality, Steinbeck inserts subtle instances throughout the novel for Ethan to change and therefore achieve redemption in his various daily experiences. Ultimately, Steinbeck’s novel concludes with seriousness, confrontation, and hope.

Righteous hope wins at the conclusion of Steinbeck’s *The Winter of Our Discontent* along with the determination to proceed aright after unethical conduct. The novel ends with a hopeful striving aided by the hopeful redemption found in nature. Ethan’s dual behaviors are replaced with a singular goal: his responsibility as a parent to aid his child. In this novel, Steinbeck presents direct and also subtle correlations to William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. Steinbeck includes Shakespeare in Ethan’s life as redemption; throughout the novel, Ethan maintains a reliance on Shakespeare. Ethan acknowledges who he truly is at the conclusion of the novel. The Place induces Ethan’s responsibility toward life and gives him a new goal, making a serious and truthful legacy to his child Ellen, void of joyful frivolity. Ethan’s duality of conduct is removed at the conclusion of the novel.

Ethan is not destroyed at the conclusion of Steinbeck’s novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Rather, Ethan confronts his moral crimes, and then he wants to live – to be
responsible for his child. John Steinbeck gives Ethan Allen Hawley the final gift of redemption, which is the chance to live and give guidance to his child.
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