Realistic Style in Steinbeck’s and Milestone’s Of Mice and Men

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A comparison of serious American fiction and film reveals that John Steinbeck has proved the most cinematically adaptable of our major novelists. At least two great films have been adapted from Steinbeck’s fiction—Lewis Milestone’s Of Mice and Men (1939) and John Ford’s The Grapes of Wrath (1940)—while two other films—Milestone’s The Red Pony (1949) and Elia Kazan’s East of Eden (1955)—are at least very good. It can be demonstrated that Steinbeck’s novels possess qualities which make them inherently adaptable for the screen; his individualized characters, strong narrative lines, and colorful settings are all as valuable in the film as they are in fiction. Yet more subtle considerations of style, mode, and medium yield greater insights into the filmic adaptability of Steinbeck’s fiction, particularly when attention is focused on the chronological pattern of these adaptations. The two great films were made from Steinbeck’s most realistic novels at the high point of American cinematic realism in the years just prior to World War Two; thus the convergence of literary and cinematic mode and style occasioned the successful screen adaptations of Steinbeck’s fiction to the film medium. This paper will consider the styles of fictional and filmic realism as exemplified in Steinbeck’s and Milestone’s Of Mice and Men in order to elucidate both works, and to extend critical discussion of literary and cinematic styles.

None of the scholarship on film realism has utilized the recent work on American fictional Realism which rejects the traditional simplifications about common matter, liberal ideas, and journalistic style as characteristic of the mode, and substitutes definitions based on the stylistic devices of Realism. In particular, the works of George Becker, Donald Pizer, and Harold Kolb on American literary Realism have created new criteria which render earlier generalizations about Realism suspect as untested clichés. For example, Professor Kolb proceeds to define the mode of Realism by topical, but not necessarily “ordinary” matter, by an ethical and liberal, though unidealized, philosophical overview, and by a characteristic
style. This Realistic style is marked by anti-omniscience, by complexity and ambiguity, by concern for character over action, and imagery over symbolism. Although he does not mention Steinbeck specifically, Professor Kolb’s definitions obviously describe in a general sense the matter, the manner, and the method employed in Of Mice and Men. Steinbeck’s short novel and the stage version which he wrote from it present not only a contemporary but a common topic of the Thirties—the lives and deaths of little people disoriented and dispossessed by the conditions of the modern world. The book’s accurate and dispassionate portrait of agricultural life in California during the Depression prefigures Steinbeck’s next novel, The Grapes of Wrath.

The characters, especially Lennie, seem almost animal-like in their simplicity, but Steinbeck is careful to portray lives shaped by ethical as well as natural forces. Lennie cannot control his natural impulses and dies like a hunted animal, while Slim, who controls his passions as expertly as his mule team, lives on as the aristocrat of merit, providing what leadership and order are found in the ranch world. George exists somewhere between these poles, dreaming of order and harmony on “a little place” while still desiring the easy pleasures of pool hall, barroom, and brothel. Thus, behavior is motivated by the whole spectrum of human involvements with society as well as with nature, and social morality is as much a theme in Of Mice and Men as it is in The Grapes of Wrath.

Steinbeck’s stylistic techniques are realistic within Professor Kolb’s definitions of realistic style. Although the point-of-view is third person, it is an objective, carefully distanced viewpoint, as dispassionate as the camera lens:

Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving among the leaves. The shade climbed up the hills toward the top. On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones. And then from the direction of the state highway came the sound of footsteps on crisp sycamore leaves. The rabbits hurried noiselessly for cover. A stilted heron labored up into the air and pounded down river. For a moment the place was lifeless, and then two men emerged from the path and came into the opening by the green pool. (2) Steinbeck seems almost to be anticipating a film version of the book in his descriptive, documentary prose. The same vision is maintained throughout the short novel. Each chapter is introduced by a detailed report of the setting and then dialogue is simply recorded with no authorial directions. This methodology increases both the complexity and the ambiguity of the work because the reader is forced to interpret the characters for himself without the benefit of editorial judgment. Neither does Steinbeck comment on his characters through symbol or symbolic action. Although Lennie is depicted through images of rabbits, mice, and birds, he is not an animal; he is to some undetermined extent a responsible human being; and he must live in society as such or be destroyed. Thus, the anti-omniscience of viewpoint and imagery increases the complexity and ambiguity of characterization, placing Of Mice and
Men solidly in the tradition of literary Realism.

Professor Kolb’s definitions also create an interesting theoretical perspective for viewing cinematic realism and works within this mode such as Milestone’s Of Mice and Men. Obviously, historical analogies are not precise because the technological development of film was necessary to portray realism on the screen. Primitive photographic apparatus, monochromatic film, and poor lighting could produce only a flickering simulacrum of real life on the early screen. Most importantly of all, sound was necessary for film to recreate experience realistically; indeed, it is impossible to conceive of the silent film as ever being essentially realistic. In a sense, sound added a whole new dimension to the medium, a dimension which transformed the stylized, often flat depiction of the silent screen into a more fully rounded representation of reality. A development of this magnitude could not help but influence every aspect of film technique. Quite logically, editing became less important, indeed almost invisible, as cuts were now made in terms of natural movements. Editing was also simplified by the extended shot which could be held indefinitely while characters moved in front of the camera. When the possibilities of the extended shot were further increased by the development of deep-focus photography, the major directors adapted it to the depiction of the particular purposes of their films. Deep focus, effective lighting, and color film all contributed to the concept of mise en scène composition, the careful arrangement of picture and action to provide the full context of an event.

The contextual style produced from the combination of these technical developments demonstrates obvious affinities to the elements of Realistic literary style schematized by Professor Kolb. First, this filmic style is strongly anti-omniscient. Instead of selecting the pieces of reality which will guide the viewer’s reaction to a situation, as in the expressionistic devices of close-up or montage, an essentially metaphoric style, the realistic film metonymically presents all the pieces of the situation much as in life, and allows the viewer to make his own selection. A corollary technique involves camera angle itself; realistic film often maintains a nearly level angle presenting a human perspective of the developing scene. The framing is as open as possible, the composition detailed and undramatic, the lighting natural, most often bright or clear. The editing, with its extended takes, also presents the viewer with a more objective view of reality.

Milestone’s film version parallels Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men in its anti-omniscient viewpoint. His camera angles from prologue to epilogue, are always at eye level, thus involving the viewer much as he would be involved by watching the action unfold in life. The director’s framing, especially in the outdoor scenes, opens wide vistas of natural and social contexts for the immediate action. His composition, though careful, is also detailed and complicated; the bunkhouse and barn interiors exemplify this method in the contextual details of social and animal life—pin-ups, bunks, harness,
etc. Even within the bunkhouse or the stables at night the light of oil lamps is bright and clear enough to illuminate the nuances of relationships, as in the shooting of Candy’s dog. His editing utilizes long takes from George and Lenny’s first conversation.

This depiction of reality becomes more ambiguous as it becomes less omniscient; the viewer is left to form his own interpretation, rather than have it shaped by the selective techniques of the director. All of the elements of picture—framing, composition, and lighting—increase the complexity of the film image, and even editing, though less apparent, becomes more devious in its attempt to conceal its operations. Invisible editing must, in one sense at least, be more difficult than the obvious juxtaposition of images. Realistic scenes are generally longer and contain more disparate elements than the shorter, quicker sequences of silent or expressionistic film. Therefore, in every element of cinematic style, realism increases the ambiguity and complexity of the film vision.

The obvious juxtaposition of images in montage editing also heightens the symbolic function of the objects contrasted. A quick cut from a character to an animal will tend metaphorically to connect the two; the realistic presentation of character and animal together in deep shots and through extended scenes will also connect the two, but more in terms of metonymy. Often, these connections will develop into less emphatic, though meaningful patterns of images. Lenny’s wee animals will serve as an example: Milestone consistently introduces rabbits, birds, puppies within a total context and without drawing symbolic attention to them by close-up or montage editing.

Professor Kolb’s other element of realistic style, emphasis on character above action, is more difficult to adapt to filmic terms. In a general sense, realistic films are obviously less epic, less melodramatic, less frenetic than silent films. But in comparison with more recent expressionistic, surrealistic, or symbolic films, does this generalization really hold true? In a sense, the ground of discussion must be shifted at this point to the larger characteristics of Realism—subject matter and philosophical outlook. Realism does tend to look at more ordinary, more common, more “average” characters, characters caught up in more topical and mundane situations and events. These characters will be carefully depicted because they are capable of ethical choices which will shape their fate. Thus, the depiction of the full complexity of character becomes more important than the exaggeration of one psychological trait, symbolic characteristic, or idea about human behavior.

In the historical development of American film realism during the Thirties these universal tendencies of the mode were reinforced by the social problems of the Depression, as well as by the business trends of the film industry. The alienation of the unemployed and the dispossessed created a liberal response in all the arts. Literature, film, theatre, painting, and music all sought to focus on the common (often the “mass”) man and his situation. The critical canons in all these forms emphasized a Realistic response to the problems
of the poor and the downtrodden. At the same moment, the uncommon men and women of Hollywood were becoming exalted and rich through the establishment of their personalities as role models for the same masses. The star system solidified certain personalities into a reality more palpable than the worlds of politics, sports, or social action. Stars thus played themselves or variations of themselves, establishing the exhibition of their characters, or even characteristics, as the purpose of filmed narrative. The convergence of all these tendencies—technical, social, and business—produced the great period of American cinematic realism, roughly between the early Thirties and World War II.

Lewis Milestone's adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* came at the high tide of this period, and for many reasons the film represents a very successful small scale combination of realistic tendencies in literature and film. First, Milestone was presented with a fine literary vehicle in both Steinbeck's fictional work and in the Broadway adaptation, where Steinbeck (with the help of George S. Kaufman) had tightened the novel considerably. Second, Milestone had at his disposal the highly polished technique of cinema realism perfected over the decade of sound production which included many of his own films. In using these techniques Milestone was able to find the graphic equivalents for the poetry of Steinbeck's patterned language. Third, the Hollywood production system provided Milestone with able assistance in Eugene Solow's script, Norbert Brodine's photography, Aaron Copland's music, and the acting of Burgess Meredith, Lon Chaney, Jr., and Charles Bickford.

Milestone opens with a prologue before the credits, a device not common at that time, and one which establishes the serious intentions of the film. The audience sees the drama of a realistic situation, rather than the details of Hollywood production. More importantly, the prologue sets mood and tone while establishing themes and motifs which will be continued throughout the film. Steinbeck preserves a greater dramatic unity by opening and closing his narrative at the narrow pool, but Milestone achieves a greater dramatic force by translating George's remarks about the trouble at Weed into an exciting chase sequence. The prologue also works toward increased realism as it extends the action of the narrative from the small world of the ranch to a larger world of Weed and the Salinas Valley country, and finally, by the implications of the hobos on the train, to all of Depression-stricken America.

The opening shot establishes the nature-man-society balance which will become thematically important throughout; as the music rises dramatically, swirling stormy clouds darken the sky. After studying the sky, the camera looks down from eye level to examine a rabbit and a flock of quail. The inhabitants of this natural world feed peacefully until human legs intrude into the frame; as the camera pulls up to eye level, the audience sees George and Lennie running wildly. Several quick cuts of the pursuing posse and their quarry capture the excitement of the chase, while in the back-
ground the thunder rolls and Copland’s music swells. Trapped like rabbits, the pair begin to panic until George leads them into an irrigation ditch; this immersion is accompanied by a cloudburst which evidently discourages the hunters, who have leaped across the ditch without discovering their prey. The emotional mood of the film (fear, frustration, hate), characterization (George as the leader, Lennie the follower), style (eye-level shots, careful framing in outdoor scenes), and theme (the relationship of human and animal worlds) are all established.

The next scene consists of one long, panning shot which shows George and Lennie still running, now at night, to catch a moving freight train. When they climb into an open boxcar, George closes the door, and against this background the credits are presented. After the credits the train fades into the distance, and the next sequence is in the interior of a bus; the other passengers are scanned as the camera settles down for an extended take of George and Lennie in the front seat talking about their new jobs at the ranch. Again this sequence is added by Milestone, made up from a few retrospective remarks by George, and again it works to open up the context of the action. The bus is full of other ranch hands like George and Lennie, and the bus driver remembers taking them to Weed. George becomes angry and defensive at the bus driver’s remarks, creating a confrontation, after which the driver puts the pair off to walk the rest of the way to the ranch. After several miles of hot pavement, George hurls a clod of earth at a signboard depicting a business man enjoying the comfort of an air-conditioned train, a life style in easy contrast to his various modes of transportation.

The next sequence presents Chapter One of the novel or Act One, Scene One, of the play. George and Lennie stop to rest beside a narrow pool of the Salinas River, and George decides to spend the night there enjoying their last freedom before their new job. Milestone’s version stays very close to the dialogue of the play, and his filmic style develops a similar sense of intimate realism. After filming the pair approach from a slight distance, the camera moves in like another person joining their conversation. Many of the cuts are held for long periods as both men are balanced in the frame; about the only cutting in the scene is from one speaker to another. In fact, editing becomes nearly invisible; it does not, for example, focus on Lennie’s dead bird (a mouse in the novel) as a symbol, but only as a part of a developing pattern of nature images within the context of the entire Lennie-George relationship.

Milestone does add one piece of dialogue to the scene; the last thing George says before they sleep is that “A man sure feels free when he ain’t got a job . . . and when he ain’t hungry.”6 Their arrival at the ranch the next day proves the wisdom of these words. The boss is mad because they have missed a half-day’s work, and he makes it plain that working on this ranch will be no picnic. In handling the interview with the boss before the arrival at the bunkhouse, Milestone reverses Steinbeck’s order of events, though each
event is substantially reproduced. This method seems to work better by providing a greater contrast of life in nature and life in society. These greater complexities of social life are mirrored in the increasing use of deep focus and in the greater detail of *mise en scène* composition. The scene opens as Candy, the aging bunkhouse swamper, leads George and Lennie across the ranch yard toward the boss's office; they are seen through the open window of the office and in the context of the cluttered desk and files. As they enter, the camera examines all the details of the interior, which is perfectly arranged to present the complicated hierarchy of the ranch as a business society. During the interview Milestone holds very extended shots on the carefully composed grouping of the four figures, with dramatic emphasis provided by shifting of the figures in front of the camera (the boss rises from his chair, Candy shuffles, Lennie cowers, George puffs himself up defensively) instead of by camera movement or cutting.

Steinbeck used a sort of verbal *mise en scène* in the depiction of the bunkhouse. Milestone picks up this cue and translates this picture perfectly to film. He has his camera at eye level, inside the door, ready to follow the trio through the room and to locate them against all of the details Steinbeck mentions, while adding a few, such as girlie pictures tacked to the walls. George's argument with Candy about the possibility of bed bugs is neatly framed by two stacks of bunks and again done in an extended shot. In both novel and play Steinbeck brings the other characters into the bunkhouse, including the boss for the interview. Milestone has the other characters presented outside, in the office, or against the natural backgrounds of ranch activity. Crooks, the black cripple who serves as stablebuck, limps by; Curly, the boss's son, rides up on a movie cowboy's white horse; Mae, Curly's wife, is playing in the barn with her fleecy puppy; Slim, the muleskinner, is first seen behind his twelve-mule team. Milestone also builds more tension by inventing a first fight between Curly and Whit, a young ranch hand, then moving to direct confrontations of Curly with Slim, George, and Lenny. Although his movement seems a little plotty in comparison with the novel, it works nicely here to widen the contexts of animal and natural images.

Milestone very carefully orchestrates these scenes in terms of composition. Mountains, barley fields, and farm machinery are balanced to emphasize the movement of characters. Curly advances through the moving belts of the threshing machines; Mae peeks out from between the wagons at Slim; George has Lenny lift a wagon on his back in a demonstration of his superhuman strength. In the movements between each of these confrontations Milestone draws back for distanced shots which locate the characters in the full context of the ranch and the natural world. Even here he holds the shots and lets the action play in front of the camera; farm wagons criss-cross in right-left, left-right lines of movement—a sort of ballet which gives a lively feeling to the bucolic life. Against this backdrop we see Lennie's brute strength, Mae's lust, and
Curly’s brutality; only Slim, the muleskinner, and to some extent, his new friend George know how to harness nature in an orderly way.

Milestone uses the wagons’ moving in at dinner time as a transitional device to several scenes which bridge the gap between afternoon and evening in the novel and the play. Instead of George and Slim talking in the bunkhouse, they hold their conversation while riding in, washing up, eating dinner. These scenes allow Milestone to do some nice mise en scène composition with visual elements like the sinewy bodies of the ranchhands in the outdoor washhouse and the heaping piles of plain food on the tables of the cookshack. He also interpolates a contrasting dinner scene at the ranchhouse, where the boss and Curly hog down their food as Mae simmers in silence. Finally she pulls a movie advertisement from her dress and asks Curly to take her to the show, but he wolfs down the rest of his pie and saunters out, throwing back the excuse that he has seen the picture with the “boys.” Mae is left behind with the indifference of her father-in-law and the antagonism of the Chinese cook.

In contrast, the dinner conversation in the cookshack is voluble and pleasant, and the friendliness continues in a game of horseshoes during the early evening. The men of the bunkhouse, for all their disparate qualities, form a more cohesive society than the family of the ranchhouse. The long sequence which forms Chapter Three of the novel and Act Two, Scene Two of the play, the shooting of Candy’s dog, demonstrates this human solidarity. Carlson, a seasoned ranchhand who seems second in command to Slim, has been after Candy to get rid of his old sheepdog because it smells up the bunkhouse. All the men commiserate with Candy, as almost all of them have dogs of their own, but finally they all agree that Candy would do better to shoot the old dog and take a pup from the litter Slim’s bitch has just dropped. When Candy cannot bring himself to do it, Carlson volunteers to shoot the dog with his pistol. Milestone handles the potentially melodramatic scene with a fine restraint, using the devices of cinematic realism to limit the sentiment inherent in the subject (though the musical background is somewhat overdone). The scene unfolds within the mise en scène earlier established in the bunkhouse, playing itself out in extended shots of the whole group debating the fate of Candy’s dog. Many of these shots are angled through the bunks or other bits of furniture, giving a fuller context to the drama pictured. Only when Candy hears Carlson’s shot does the camera close up on him isolated in his bunk. Of course, the scene requires this extended treatment because it prefigures Lennie’s death at the conclusion of the film.

Lennie is not present in the bunkhouse; rather he is out in the barn playing with the pup Slim has given him. Milestone crosscuts back to the ranchhouse to show Mae alone, pacing and brooding; when she flips on the radio, the raucous swing music contrasts with Copland’s quiet background score in the bunkhouse scene. The radio irritates Mae’s father-in-law, so she decides to visit
her puppy in the barn. Slim and Crooks have also headed to the barn to look after the mules, and she takes the opportunity to talk to Slim about why he absolutely rejects her (another scene invented by Milestone), but Curly, who is always checking on her movements, uses their proximity and the gift of the puppy to start another confrontation.

The resulting fracas leaves George and Lennie together in the bunkhouse, where they can discuss their plans. They are not alone, though, for Candy is still quietly curled up in his bunk. When George begins another description of their little place, the camera holds on him and Lennie for a full five minutes; slowly, in the far background shadows, Candy changes his position as he hears their plans for the little place. Then he gets up and crosses the room, filling the opening between George and Lennie. Hesitatingly, he asks to be included in their plans; now alone without his old dog, he must have some companionship. As he tells George that otherwise he faces only the county home, the camera moves to a closeup of his broken face and then, through more ordinary cutting back and forth, unfolds their debate. Candy has $340 to contribute toward the purchase of the ranch. George climbs into his upper bunk to think the proposition over; the camera now looks over his shoulder down at the expectant Lennie and the hopeful Candy. Suddenly George jumps down; they will do it. They almost dance between the stacks of bunks, while the camera holds all three yelling out their contributions and desires. Overall, the whole sequence is a splendid example of how cinematic style can evoke the full power of dramatic performances.

The next sequence, Lennie’s fight with Curly, begins with extended shots of the group returning to the bunkhouse; Slim verbally puts down Curly, and then Carlson does the same. In his frustration Curly turns on Lennie, and Milestone uses his quickest cutting and most dramatic montage effects to achieve the sense of physical urgency the scene requires. The cuts jump from one combatant to the other, and to the circle of ranchhands urging Lennie to defend himself. Finally the badgered giant catches one of Curly’s fists in his big paw and slowly crushes it. The camera holds a long closeup on the fist, and Copland’s music also rises to a crescendo. Fortunately, Slim is able to browbeat Curly into covering up the fight, saving Lennie’s job.

Milestone interpolates the next scene—Saturday night in the town barroom. Not only does it give him the opportunity for another realistic mise en scène composition, but it again extends the contexts of the central narrative. George is tempted by booze and floozies, but he maintains his balance, has one beer, and mails a money order off to make a down payment on the little farm. Almost the whole sequence is shot from directly beside the booth where George, Whit, and Carlson sit with three good-time girls. This set-up also allows Milestone to re-emphasize one motif, the tawdry dreams of Hollywood; the girls introduce themselves as Marlene Dietrich, Jean Harlow, and Greta Garbo; “Garbo” even
camps, "I want to be alone."

The real Greta Garbo's publicity-oriented aloofness is in direct contrast with the realistic loneliness of Steinbeck's characters. One of the most lonely, Crooks, the black stablebuck, is featured in the next sequence, when Lennie, finally tiring of his pup, visits his room in the barn. At first Crooks refuses to let him in, because he is refused admittance to the segregated bunkhouse. But Lennie's innocence encourages Crook's trust, and this human contact opens him up to Candy also. Soon Crooks is also in on the "little place" plan; when George returns from town all three are drinking, smoking, and singing. Crook's room, actually the harness room of the barn, gives Milestone another carefully detailed setting that carries symbolic overtones. As Crooks himself says, he has his own room, but also his own dung heap. The whole sequence is shot much in the same style as the bunkhouse scenes, and when Mae intrudes once more, Milestone has the opportunity to do some nice choreography with his figures before the camera.

Unfortunately, the boss finds Mae with the men and tells Curly when he returns from town; Curly, unable to start a fight, throws her out the next morning. Milestone adds this scene between Mae and Curly, and it works very well in terms of motivating Mae's subsequent behavior toward Lennie. When she goes to the barn to retrieve her pet, she finds Lennie mourning over his puppy, the pup having gone the way of his mice and birds. Mae wants any sort of human response, and she begins to flirt with Lennie. Steinbeck sets the scene in the barn with its naturalistic implications; Milestone cinematically realizes them by photographing against this realistic backdrop and by viewing his characters through the perspectives of rails and pens and hay bales. As Lennie and Mae talk, the camera does more close-up work than it has throughout the film. Each character is locked in his own dream—Lennie's of the little place, Mae's of Hollywood.

The murder itself is handled deftly and with considerable decorum. Originally Milestone had thought of having Mae killed by someone else in order to preserve audience sympathy for Lennie; Steinbeck, rightly, protested that such a move would dissipate the tragic inevitability of the conclusion. Quick cutting captures the physical tension of the scene, and the camera holds a long close-up on Mae's shoes suspended a few inches above the ground by Lennie's iron grasp on her throat. Her left shoe dangles, then drops off, and a few seconds later Lennie lets her crumple to the barn floor.

In spite of her death, life goes on much as usual. After Lennie runs, Slim's bitch comes back to her pups; Candy comes in and picks one out to be his; George and Crooks play at horseshoes. Candy and George discover the crime as the dog comes to them carrying Mae's shoe in its mouth. George decides, with Slim's approval, that he must kill Lennie himself so that the lynch mob organized by Curly won't get a chance at him. This final sequence is reminiscent of the prologue and the first scene at the narrow pool
in both action and treatment. George and Slim race to the pool and quickly find Lennie. Slim walks off as Milestone cross-cuts to the posse led by the Sheriff and to the mob led by Curly. The camera holds extended takes of George and Lennie as George delivers his traditional monologues; now as George describes the little place he has Lennie look across the narrow pool and imagine what it will be like. In a final act of human imagination Lennie does see the future that George so movingly presents. The camera holds on them together for several minutes and then follows George as he pulls back and takes the pistol from beneath his jacket. Like Carlson he is a careful shot; he fires once, and turns his head in horror at his act. Milestone has Lenny fall into the pool, once again immersing himself as he had in the prologue. The director also adds an epilogue in which Slim joins George, an act of supportive comradeship, and George, at Slim’s urging, surrenders the gun to the sheriff who has arrived with the posse. Then, after they have walked off, Copland’s theme music rises and a final shot holds on the same scene as the seasons change—leaves fall and a squirrel scampers on the fallen tree where Lennie sat. Recalling the rabbit and quail of the prologue, the natural movement poetically states that Lennie has returned to the nature which he loved, leaving George to the greater complexities of human nature in its social organization.

An extended comparison of a novel and its film adaptation must inevitably end in an evaluation of the success of both. The excellent work of the cast, the creative contributions of the technical staff, and the director’s thoughtful combination of these efforts into an extension of the novel’s Realistic thrust, all combine to make Milestone’s version even more powerful than Steinbeck’s. This judgment is not made in a denigration of the novel; rather, it is a fine piece of fiction, but Milestone from it created an even finer film, a film which demonstrates the convergence of realistic fictional and cinematic styles.

NOTES

1 I have not seen the Mexican film version of The Pearl (1947), but it is reputed to be an excellent film; Steinbeck worked on its screenplay, as well as on The Red Pony. Steinbeck’s screenplay for Kazan’s Viva Zapata! (1952) is one of his finest works; see Robert E. Morsberger’s Viking edition (1975).

Page references are to the Bantam Pathfinder edition (New York, 1971), which is most widely available.

Other important films of Milestone’s include: All Quiet on the Western Front (1931), The Front Page (1931), Rain (1932), Hallelujah, I’m a Bum (1933), Anything Goes (1936), The General Died at Dawn (1936), The Purple Heart (1944), A Walk in the Sun (1945), The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers (1946), Les Miserables (1952), Pork Chop Hill (1959). The predominance of Realistic literary adaptations and anti-war films is obvious.

The opening is very reminiscent of the opening shot of Pare Lorentz’ The River (1937), which had a wide influence on Hollywood directors of a serious bent.

Quotations from the film are taken from the final print; I have not seen a shooting script or screenplay.

Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1958), p. 140. Prof. Lisca cites a letter of Steinbeck to his literary agent dated March, 1938 as the source of this statement.

George is not handcuffed as Andrew Sarris states in his essay “Toward a Theory of Film History” which prefaces The American Cinema (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 20. Unless there were different endings, which I doubt, it appears Mr. Sarris has “disremembered.”