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SOCIETY'S ROLE IN THE ADJUSTMENT OF DEVIANT AND RETARDED CHARACTERS IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE PASTURES OF HEAVEN* AND *OF MICE AND MEN*

As a social creature man must interact with others in order to survive and to acquire human ways of behavior, which vary among groups or societies but are standardized within one social group. Theodore Newcomb, the social psychologist, claims that "individual social behavior is thus highly adaptable. It is susceptible to a very wide range of social influences, but it is not infinitely adaptable" (66). Human behavior is constantly modified by social interaction. To quote Wheeler and Perkins: "the individuality of a person emerges as one totality from the human-nature pattern around him" (FREEL 23). This way, individuals as parts of any social organization absorb the characteristics of those around them.

Individuals can do only what the society lets them; people are restricted in their freedom by pressures of the group. These can be overt and even formalized, as laws, rules, mores and etiquette. Yet sometimes the pressures to adapt to a certain way of thinking or a pattern of behavior may be subtle or difficult to locate, for instance the weight of others' opinion or the fear of disapproval. Frequently group norms can be treated as a defensive mechanism against individual deviations, which may be harmful to the group. On the other hand, individuals want to retain some personal freedom of action, which leads to tension between the rights of individuals and the demands of the society.

Any person who becomes a member of a group begins to display certain properties or modes of reaction, which he did not display outside the group. Therefore, being members of a larger whole, humans respond to stimuli in

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their relations to other members of a group. The situation is clear if individuals do not threaten the group norms by their abnormal behavior. If they do, society intrudes into the individuals' adjustment with the purpose of maintaining order. This often happens in the cases of social deviants or the retarded, whose modes of behavior are not accepted by a particular society. Eiser claims that "groups need their deviants, or active minorities" (271) as individuals compare themselves with others, not just to see similarities (uniformity), but also to see differences (deviation).

The Pastures of Heaven and *Of Mice and Men* offer a wide spectrum of society's perception and treatment of deviants and the retarded. The society of the Pastures of Heaven does not accept the lifestyles of several of its inhabitants, among them Junius Maltby. During his life in San Francisco, he absorbs the characteristics of people around him. Yet some health complications resulting form his work force him to change his lifestyle and habitat so he moves to the valley of the Pastures of Heaven. There he can indulge in the laziness that his busy life as a clerk lacked. He does not pay attention to other people as he spends most of his time musing and reading books.

When Junius gets married in the Pastures of Heaven, he becomes a part of a larger whole and thus it is expected of him that he display new modes of behavior. Yet he does not want to abandon his old behavior patterns. Therefore "poverty [sits] cross-legged on the farm, and the Maltbys [are] ragged" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 67). As his family is undernourished and they cannot fight an epidemic, Junius is left alone with a newborn son. The young father mismanages the farm and does not bring his son up properly. His neighbors' ambiguous attitudes towards Junius stem from his controversial behavior as they "hated him with the loathing busy people have for lazy ones, and they sometimes […] envied his laziness; but often they pitied him because he blundered so" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 68).

Junius' unorthodox upbringing of Robbie concerns and upsets people, as society realizes that the basic needs of the child, such as food, shelter and education, are not being met. Junius is perceived by society as "an impoverished, absent-minded, irresponsible father of a dreamy, philosophical cast of mind, so much a child that he treats the boy as his equal" (WATT 37). Junius cannot be trusted in such serious matters as upbringing. However, the neighbors are "mostly good people, they [feel] a strong reluctance for interfering with Junius' affairs" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 73). It seems the reluctance is not strong enough to prevent the final intrusion. The ladies of the valley wait patiently till Robbie is of school age when they can finally have some influence on the boy's life.

Junius accepts the inevitability of society's intrusion into the life of his family. He says "I don't much want you to go [to school], either. But we have laws. The law has a self-protective appendage called penalty. We have to balance the pleasure of breaking the law against the punishment" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 73). In this situation at least, Junius is more reasonable than his son.

Society is still not satisfied with Junius and Robbie's adjustment. The 'respectable members' of society believe that harm is still being done to the boy. They decide to help the impoverished family to be happy again. Watt rightly notices that:

> a fall from happy innocence for both Robbie and his father Junius comes only when the neighbors—Mrs. Munroe among them—take a kindly conventional do-gooders' attitude which makes the Maltbys realize for the first time that they are socially disreputable (37).

Being a member of the society obliges Junius to act in compliance with its demands and rules. The Maltbys' mode of behavior does not go along with the one accepted and desired by the society, only because society claims to be wiser and better informed than the family about proper lifestyles.

The pressures of society restrict the Maltbys' freedom of action. Junius is compelled to transform himself from "a natural man to an artificial man in response to the conformist pressures of a society" (LEVANT 46). The benevolent neighbors do not want to offend Junius with open criticism of the life he leads. Therefore, by giving a gift, they show him the errors of his life. The small gift of clothes suggests that society finds Junius' poverty disreputable. The school board intend to be charitable but they are "officious too, interfering with the Maltbys more than circumstances warranted" (FONTENROSE 10). The so-called humane members of society pretend not to intrude into the Maltbys' privacy, yet they believe they know better what the family needs. The family is suddenly made poor and disreputable by the standards of society. Junius' recognition of the social demands crushes the world he has created.

In this case society agrees to aid the Maltbys as it believes materialistic social values to be the most important ones. The do-gooders act according to the strict norms set by themselves, that is they act automatically without considering the circumstances. Mrs. Munroe buys clothes believing that she is helping others to be happy. The problem is that no one in the valley realizes that Junius and, most likely, Robbie may be happy as they are.

The society of the Pastures of Heaven believes in the rightness of its actions. By disagreeing with the standards set by themselves, members of the society would admit the possible fallacy of their own laws. Hence nobody

disagrees with the norms set by themselves. The society "represent[s] evil that wears the trappings of social approval while it tramples on private happiness. The fact is that no one—least of all Junius Maltby—can deny the correctness of Mrs. Munroe's social concern" (LEVANT 48). Society is subject to its own norms and it wants the Maltbys to be a part of it. It often imposes restrictions and conditions and individuals in turn "defer to the norms of their group, and will validate their own judgments by reference to others" (EISER 310). Junius is successfully "convinced by well-meaning neighbors that raising his boy in natural freedom is harmful to the child" (HYMAN 157). It is doubtful whether these neighbors are so well-meaning, as they ought to respect private family rules. On the other hand, allowing them to follow private codes of behavior could lead to a relaxation of social norms that could result in shattering the social order. The "well-meaning" neighbors cannot allow this to happen.

Society intrudes into the personal adjustment of the Maltbys. It does not allow the family to find their ways and decide what is best for them. Through heartless meddling, society imposes its own standards of appearance and farm maintenance. The respected members cannot endure Junius and Robby's indifference to these standards.

There is another family in the Pastures of Heaven that fails to live up to society's standards. The Lopez sisters are "happy and make others so by giving their favors to customers who patronize their restaurant" (LISCA *Nature* 48). Although the sisters are very industrious in encouraging their clients to visit them, they do not take money for prostituting themselves; they just charge clients for the food they have eaten. This is why the sisters believe they will not fall into disrepute. Yet the women of the Pastures of Heaven know about the sisters' conduct and "the whisper [goes] about that the Lopez sisters [are] bad women. Ladies of the valley [speak] cold to them" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 93). Their popularity among women is inversely proportional to that among men. However, the sisters do not offend social moral standards till the moment when the idle gossip arouses the jealousy of one wife.

Moral fallacy and social disapproval strike the sisters only when the sheriff closes down their home-restaurant. The Lopez sisters accept society's right to intrude into their adjustment. Society's judgment is so great that it renders the sisters' resistance useless. The stigmatized sisters realize that to be a part of this society they have to abide by their rules of conduct. Yet, they are not "uncritically submissive to the authority of the group" (YOUNISS 8) as they do not adhere to conventional values forced on them by society. They do not want to change so they leave the valley and become prostitutes.

The cases analyzed prove that the society of the Pastures of Heaven is intolerant of any deviation from its norms. It does not let its members be what they want to be. Society allows itself to intrude into personal adjustments under the pretext of social concern. This victimizes another character, Banks in *The Pastures of Heaven*, who is persuaded to believe in the infallibility of society's right to intervene.

Banks' custom of visiting executions in prison is not approved of by society. Other members of society find fault with Banks for witnessing hangings. Banks' uncommon fondness of the sight of death does nobody any harm, nor does it threaten the stability of society. Banks finds pleasure in something that terrifies others and this makes him odd. If his fondness of the sight of death were kept secret, Banks would most likely not be perceived as deviant. Banks considers himself normal till Bert Munroe refuses his invitation to a hanging. By this gesture Bert criticizes Banks' behavior and at the same time expresses society's low opinion of him. Society disapproves of Banks' habit, intrudes into his life and forces him to accept appropriate behavior.

A society readily intervenes into individual adjustment when deviants and retarded people cannot behave in accepted ways. Tularecito, in *The Pastures of Heaven*, is a man whose brain ceased to develop in childhood. He is still mentally a child in the misshapen body of an adult. He is "one of those whom God has not quite finished" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 40); this gives society a justifiable right to intrude into his process of adaptation.

The Little Frog, Tularecito, is a good creature that does the bulk of the work on Gomez's farm where he lives. He is skilled at manual labor, yet his brain remains untouched by any thinking. Tularecito does not attend school until he is eleven. Being afraid of the institution, the Little Frog disappears on several occasions. Finally "the concerned forces of the law gather him in and put him in school" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 38). His brain is impervious to any knowledge; hence he learns nothing either at school or in contact with society. Due to "some lack of intelligence, temperament, or imagination [Tularecito] fall[s] short of valley or middle-class standards" (MCCARTHY 37). He is not mentally equipped to acquire the norms of the valley.

It is probable that Tularecito would not fail to obtain social standards if he were left undisturbed in the surroundings he is comfortable in. McCarthy notices that:

> [l]eft on the ranch with Gomez, Tularecito would do all right, for he has a natural way with animals and plants. But as this remarkable abilities and natural simplicity are not balanced by adequate intelligence, Tularecito remains oblivious of the expectations of others (37).

If he were allowed to lead his life the way he could, The Little Frog's behavior would not be incompatible with the standards of society. In this sense the social right to intervene is doubtful. Levant comes to the similar conclusion that "social pressures, like those which produce the school law, are not necessarily good" (41). Having analyzed the case of Tularecito, it is hard not to agree with Levant.

Tularecito is left alone in the crowd as nobody makes an effort to understand him. Therefore "his strongest feeling is a sense of extreme loneliness, an almost total isolation from other people—from normal humanity" (LEVANT 41-42). The lonely Tularecito is given hope, though. His schoolteacher, Molly Morgan, discovers his gift of drawing animals on a blackboard and of carving them in sandstone through which he "shows his kinship with the animals" (WILSON 36). Then she encourages him to look for gnomes and elves. Tularecito innocently believes in the story about gnomes with whom "he may have more natural affinities […] than with men" (SNELL 191). He frantically indulges in digging in the ground for his people. His persistent digging attracts Bert's attention when he notices the holes in his orchard. In the fight that results Tularecito hits Bert with a shovel and nearly kills him. As a result of this fight Tularecito is committed to an institution for the criminally insane.

Society does not remain indifferent towards misfits. It imposes some standards of behavior and intrudes in private adjustments. The members of society are responsible for the final commitment of the retarded boy to the asylum. In this way narrow-mindedness leads to intolerance of otherness. This is why "society is ultimately responsible for Tularecito's tragedy because it has not the greatness of vision or heart to recognize and accept Tularecito's difference" (HUGHES 101). They are unable to accept his mental inadequacy, and treat him as an idiot and a deviant.

The Little Frog gets into difficulties with accepting social norms and standards as he is not mentally equipped to follow them. Concluding, Tularecito is "a creature [who] does not rest well with Pastures residents, whose narrow sympathies will not admit someone so unlike themselves. Thus, Tularecito is indeed called insane and locked away" (HUGHES 101). The Little Frog has no chance in struggling with the complex and incomprehensible world of "normal" humans.

The so-called "normal people" give themselves the right to condemn the deviants, to intrude into their lives. Society treats insane people as disabled, which gives it the right to intrude into their adaptation process. The cases of

invasion into ways of managing reality are intermingled with the cases of the characters "not quite finished by God".

The intellectual functioning of retarded people, such as Tularecito, is significantly below average. The feeble-minded are more prone to neurological abnormalities, such as impairment of memory, orientation and judgment. Moreover, they display emotional overactivity and lack of control over their own behavior. What is more retarded persons' mental defectiveness is accompanied by instability and imbalance, manifested in fits of irritability, excitement or sulkiness.

Manny Munroe is another child character in *The Pastures of Heaven* with obvious limitations. A significant difference between Tularecito and Manny is that the process of adaptation of the former is abruptly terminated, whereas Manny can live undisturbed at home. Society can unabashedly intrude into the Little Frog's adjustment, as he has nobody who can understand and resist the pressures of society. The retarded Manny, on the other hand, is beyond society's influence.

Manny lives peacefully on a farm with his family. Although his presence probably could not endanger others' safety, he is never exposed to the outside world. Yet, when he is horrified he lacks emotional stability, to say the least. The following description shows the boy's mental deficiency:

> They [his parents] would not know he was subnormal, his brain development arrested by his adenoidal condition. Ordinarily Manny was a good child, tractable and easily terrified into obedience, but, if he were terrified a little too much, an hysteria resulted that robbed him of self-control and even of a sense of self-preservation. He [was] known to beat his forehead on the floor until the blood ran into his eyes (STEINBECK *Pastures* 12).

Manny's reactions when he is frightened are definitely far from normal. Manny also seems to suffer from impairment of judgment, comprehension and orientation, so that he loses his sense of time and space.

The same society that is so intolerant of Tularecito's otherness, accepts Manny through its ignorance. It is true that the Little Frog causes some problems at school but Manny, unlike Tularecito, is never asked to attend any school. Knowing the descriptions of his reactions, it is possible to predict Manny's hypothetical behavior at school. Yet Manny is left alone and society does not try to control or intervene in his adjustment. Of the two cases Tularecito, who is mentally retarded but quite sane, is committed to an asylum; while Manny who is insane, is left in the custody of his parents. The rigid norms, used by society to assess the level of adaptation and sanity of its members, are not always the same.

It is not only the Munroes who hide an insane child from the public. Helen Van Deventer devotes her life to the upbringing of her daughter, Hilda. As a child, Hilda causes problems with her destructive temper and habits of howling and shattering anything breakable. The family physician tells Helen that her daughter "is not completely well in her mind" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 50). He also suggests taking Hilda to the psychiatrist as only this could cure the girl. Although Helen realizes her daughter's mental problems, she does not allow Hilda to be taken away from her. Helen hungers for a tragedy. This makes her masochistically project problems on her offspring. She forces hardships upon herself and then contentedly states "that seems to be [her] life" (STEINBECK *Pastures* 50).

Helen, who suffers from affective psychosis, has created the grounds that make Hilda equally insane. As normal behavior results partially from normal surroundings, Hilda has little chance of a healthy mental life. It is proven by Wheeler and Perkins who state that "normality in the individual depends upon normality of the distribution of human traits around him" (FREEL 114-115). Being in the presence of a psychotic and mentally unbalanced mother, Hilda unconsciously copies her behavior. It stands to reason that Hilda, locked away in a private prison—their newly built house in the Pastures—absorbs behavior patterns from her mother. Helen does not let society meddle with her privacy. She has the means—money and respectability—to keep society at distance and not allow them to intrude into her life.

Analysis of these three characters reveals that the society of the Pastures of Heaven allows insanity only under certain circumstances—when money and family support are available. But the lone ones, such as Tularecito, are debilitated. Therefore it is easy to come to the conclusion that "in Steinbeck's world, society confines those like little frog […] while it permits madness to flourish if it can disguise itself with a mask of respectability" (HUGHES 101). Society intrudes in the lives of those who have nobody to support them and leaves alone those who have the means to resist its pressures. It is society that is ultimately responsible for creating unsolvable conflicts for retarded characters like Tularecito.

The feeble-minded characters take part in conflicts that stem from social intrusion or environmental barriers. There is at least one more character among Steinbeck's heroes whose defects influence the process of adaptation. Lennie Small, from *Of Mice and Men*, is a retarded giant with a strong body and a weak mind. Called by some critics "a harmless moron" (SNELL 193) or "weird freak" (GEISMAR 257), Lennie is not well equipped by nature to face

society with its rules and norms. Therefore this "hulking, half-mad, infantile giant" (GEISMAR 259) travels with his more socially adjusted friend, George.

All critics realize that Lennie's body is far ahead of his mind and very often their descriptions include such opinions. Yet Burton Rascoe's description of Lennie as: "a man who would be described in any police docket or in a detective's dossier as a sexual pervert or degenerate" (60) is derogatory. Rascoe measures the feeble-minded by his own standards of behavior. These Lennie cannot acquire. His monstrosity is at least partly diminished, by some psychological implications, in Rascoe's interpretation. Here Lennie is further described as:

> in almost any psychiatrist's case history, probably, a man afflicted with gigantism, with an abnormally low I.Q., usual thyroid deficiency, excessive pituitary secretion with resulting imbalance, a tactile fetish, psychic and/or physical impotence, and with improperly functioning adrenals which caused him in moments of fear to act destructively without intention (61).

Here, great importance is given to mental health conditions beyond Lennie's control, which make this retarded character a misfit in society.

Lennie's biologically deformed mind does not allow him to escape the conflicts he encounters and so he has hardly any chances for normal conduct. Levant rightly points out that: "the chances for good life against the flawed human material that Lennie symbolizes most completely and the code of rough justice that most people accept" (134) are none. The limitations of his body, his social standing and social norms enmesh him. Try as they might, Gorge and Lennie "are scarcely in a position to attain them [their ambitions]. They are caught between the dual pressures of their own limitations and those imposed by their station in society" (BURGUM 109). If George and Lennie were given the respectability, social position and money of Van Deventers in the Pastures of Heaven, they would most likely lead an undisturbed life.

As a regular member of society Lennie has the freedom to act. Yet, controlled by his flawed mind, he misuses his freedom, unaware of the consequences of its abuse. There is a concomitant loss of goal-directed behavior in Lennie's actions. This giant is absorbed in his self, he cannot realistically fulfill future goals. Moreover "in his inability to distinguish right from wrong Lennie is presented as a moral as well as a psychological symbol" (PHILIPS 96). His decision-making is impaired and therefore causes problems.

Feeble-minded characters are perceived as disabled by the rest of society, and therefore they are given special treatment. Retarded people, such as Lennie, cannot be trusted. Hence "the story could also be about the dumb, clumsy, but strong mass of humanity and its shrewd manipulators" (LISCA "Motif

and Pattern" 232). First, society allows the adaptation process to happen. Then it imposes hard-to-attain standards on feeble-minded humans, and finally it intrudes and destroys private worlds. Lennie can be perceived as "the perfect victim for an intruding social world which will eventually deny that freedom" (SPILKA 61). Because of the "unenlightened treatment of […] the mentally retarded" (GOLDHURST 48) by society, Lennie is doomed to fail.

Critics sometimes misread Lennie's complex figure. Some claim that he is just a "simpleton" (WILSON 37). Others ignore the importance of his socio-psychological problems and claim that "Lennie seems rather more like a digestional disturbance than a social problem" (GEISMAR 256). Still others degrade this character to the bare status of a literary device:

> Lennie has been viewed sometimes as an example of Steinbeck's preoccupation with subhuman types; actually Lennie is not a character in the story at all; but rather a device like a golden coin in Moby Dick to which the other characters may react in a way that allows the reader to perceive their attitudes (FRENCH 67).

It is hard to agree with any of these statements. The fallacy of these interpretations stems form the fact that critics pay no attention to the socio-psychological layer of Lennie's actions. It is enough to notice, "the innocence [in Lennie which is] enmeshed in an uncomprehending world" (SNELL 191). Lennie's helplessness, resulting from his feeble-mindedness, manifests itself in his inability to comprehend abstract norms and standards ruling the modern world. Lennie is a victim of society as his inarticulate yearnings are not understood and he cannot successfully resist the intruding forces of society.

All the feeble-minded characters can be characterized by their helplessness in the face of conflicts. They follow fixed patterns of behavior. Due to mental limitations, retarded characters find it difficult to adjust effectively to changing circumstances. Dorothy Mundy claims that there is an inverse relationship between intelligence and conformity in people (26). All the retarded characters presented in this paper exemplify Mundy's thesis. They all have intelligence significantly below average and their process of adaptation is impaired. Lennie is not capable of resisting the desire to stroke furry animals, Tularecito to dig for elves and Manny to hit his head on the ground. All of them are half-wits, but ultimately it is society, rather than nature, that has made them what they are.

Society's strict rules and unacquirable standards make feeble-minded and deviant characters different. The two retarded characters, Tularecito and Lennie, are innocent creatures that cannot comprehend abstract norms. They try to balance their personal needs and the demands of society, yet their mental limitations hamper this process. The incongruity of their odd behav-

ior and the standards of behavior set by society justifies society's intrusion into their adjustments. Social concern also seems to be the reason for the intrusions of society into deviants' adjustment. Although Junius Maltby, The Lopez sisters and Banks are not insane, they depart markedly from the accepted norms and therefore their adjustments are recognized as disreputable. They attempt to solve conflicts involving their own needs and the demands of society. Such deviations from the social norms shatter the social order. In order to prevent this, members of society recourse to forced intrusions into individual adjustments.

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ROLA SPOŁECZEŃSTWA W PRZYSTOSOWANIU SIĘ BOHATERÓW Z ZABURZENIAMI UMYSŁOWYMI W POWIEŚCIACH JOHNA STEINBECKA *PASTWISKA NIEBIESKIE* I *MYSZY I LUDZIE*

Streszczenie

Status członka społeczeństwa narzuca na jednostkę przymus przystosowania się do jego norm. Jeśli osoba, poprzez odmienność swojego zachowania, zagraża stabilności danej grupy społecznej, grupa ta czuje się usprawiedliwiona wpływać na jej zachowanie. Ta sytuacja ma miejsce w przypadkach, gdy osoby umysłowo lub społecznie upośledzone odchylają się w swoim zachowaniu od norm ściśle określonych przez dane społeczeństwo.

John Steinbeck w dwóch swoich powieściach: *Pastwiska Niebieskie* oraz *Myszy i Ludzie* pokazuje, jak społeczności wkraczają w proces adaptacji osób nieprzystosowanych. Postaci te charakteryzują się bezradnością wobec narzuconych abstrakcyjnych norm społecznych. Ich upośledzenia nie pozwalają im na zrozumienie zmiennego stosunku społeczeństwa do ich aberracji. Pod wpływem pewnych czynników, takich jak powszechne poważanie i zamożność rodzin, społeczeństwo może zdecydować się na akceptację odchyleń od własnych norm. To wewnętrznie sprzeczne podejście do odchyleń podkreśla fakt, że u Steinbecka postrzeganie zaburzeń umysłowych oraz społecznych jest w nienaturalnie dużym stopniu uwarunkowane indywidualną pozycją w społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: dewiacja, człowiek nieprzystosowany, ograniczony umysłowo, opóźniony w rozwoju, społeczeństwo, przystosowanie się, proces adaptacji, John Steinbeck, *Pastwiska Niebieskie*, *Myszy i Ludzie*.

Key words: deviation, misfit, feeble-minded, retarded, society, adjustment, the process of adaptation, John Steinbeck, *The Pastures of Heaven*, *Of Mice and Men*.