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Research Article

Ecological Consciousness in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat*: An Ecocritical Reading

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Abstract

*This paper explores ecological consciousness in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* through the lens of ecocriticism. Although the novel has often been interpreted as a light-hearted and comic tale of paisanos living in post-war Monterey, this study argues that beneath its humor lies a profound ecological vision. Steinbeck portrays characters whose lives are closely tied to the land, the sea, and other living beings, thereby suggesting that human existence cannot be separated from the natural world. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Aldo Leopold, Paul Taylor, and other ecocritics, the research emphasizes three key aspects: the holistic interconnectedness between humans and nature, the significance of simple and sustainable lifestyles, and the reverence for the natural environment. The communal life of the paisanos characterized by sharing, closeness to the land, and respect for nonhuman beings illustrates principles of deep ecology and biocentrism. At the same time, their rejection of materialism and pursuit of contentment through community and nature subtly challenges the anthropocentric values that dominate modern industrial societies. Methodologically, the study is based on close textual analysis of Steinbeck's novel, supported by critical readings in ecocriticism. The findings suggest that *Tortilla Flat* anticipates many concerns of contemporary ecological thought, offering valuable insights into how literature can shape ethical attitudes toward sustainability, environmental harmony, and ecological justice.*

Keywords: Ecological Consciousness, interconnection, environment, co-existence

Intoduction

This research examines ecological consciousness in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935). The novel explores the natural environment and its interactions between humans and their surroundings. It endeavors to highlight the interconnection of the human and natural world through land and animal resources. The main characters, along with others in the novel, reveal their concern

about being ecologically conscious through their behavior. In their daily activities, they reflect the requirement of integration and harmony with the natural world for the harmonious life of human beings.

This research work focuses on the ecological consciousness throughout the lives of the characters. For this purpose, Peter Singer's idea for a place of non-human and Aldo Leopold's ideas for land ethics have been taken into consideration for analysis. Other eco-critical theorists such as William Rueckert, and Paul W. Taylor have also been taken as theoretical insights. The argument developed in this research is the interconnection among land, animals, and humans for their peaceful co-existence. Human beings' existence is dependent on the environment and animals. Similarly, animals' existence has relied upon land and nature. The separation of animals and human beings from the physical environment is almost impossible. On the other hand, nature's or land's existence is almost insignificant in the absence of animals and human beings. There is symbiotic balance when land, animals, and human beings mutually exist.

Tortilla Flat is set in the post-World War I era in the coastal town of Monterey, California. The story centers on Danny, a paisano who inherits two houses from his grandfather. Danny's inheritance becomes a hub for his group of friends: Pilon, Pablo, Jesus, Maria Corcoran, and Big Joe. These friends characterized by their mixed Spanish Indian and Mexican heritage live a life of relatively poor but find joy in their friendship and simple pleasures. The novel is episodic, following the groups' various adventures and misadventures. Their experiences range from light-hearted thefts and drunken festivities to acts of genuine kindness and charity. Danny's generosity and open-heartedness often lead the group into trouble, but they remain fiercely loyal to one another. Each character brings a unique perspective and contributes to the dynamic of the group, reflecting broader themes of community and friendship. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck explores deeper themes such as loyalty, human condition, and search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. The paisanos' way of life, though unconventional, emphasize the importance of human connection and the value of living in the present. Despite the flaws and the hardships most of the characters face, they maintain a sense of dignity and resilience. Steinbeck's rich description of the Monterey landscape and vivid depiction of the paisanos' lives provide an emotional and often sharp explanation on the involvedness of human nature.

Statement of the Problem

John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* has traditionally been studied for its comic portrayal of the paisanos, social relationships, and human-centered narratives. While much critical attention has focused on the novel's humor, socio-economic aspects, and psychological dimensions of the characters, limited scholarly work has explored the ecological dimension embedded in the narrative. Specifically, there is a gap in understanding how Steinbeck portrays the interdependent relationship among humans, animals, and land, and how this reflects a broader ecological consciousness. Existing studies either treat nature as a backdrop or focus exclusively on human experiences, overlooking the symbiotic and ethical relations between human beings and the environment that the novel implicitly promotes. Therefore, the problem this study addresses is: How does *Tortilla Flat* reflect ecological consciousness, emphasizing the interconnectedness and ethical coexistence of humans, animals, and nature?

Hypothesis

The study hypothesizes that John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* embodies a profound ecological consciousness that highlights the interdependence among humans, animals, and the land. It is proposed that the novel portrays the paisanos' simple, communal lifestyle as an ethical model that fosters environmental harmony and sustainability. Moreover, it suggests that through their

interactions with nature and nonhuman beings, the characters exemplify principles of deep ecology and biocentrism, thereby challenging anthropocentric and materialistic values prevalent in modern societies.

Literature Review

Eco-criticism is the literary study that theorizes the interconnectedness and harmonious relationship between literature and the physical environment. It portrays the relationships among human beings, the animal world, and nature, taking an earth-centered approach to literary studies. This theory emerged as a reaction to man's anthropocentric attitude of dominating nature and non-human species contributing to the ecosystem. Eco-criticism is not only the study of aesthetic aspects, but nature encompasses the whole physical environment, including humans, non-humans, and the landscape. The interconnection among these entities creates the harmonious bond which is the basis of ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty, in her book *The Ecocriticism Reader*, defines ecocriticism as:

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (Introduction, xviii)

Glotfelty opines that ecocriticism shows the relation between biotic and abiotic elements of nature. In this sense, it focuses on how animals, landscapes, and nature are portrayed in literature. It draws a parallel between humans and other creatures, including land, and advocates proper respect for each entity. Aldo Leopold, in his article "The Land Ethic," conveys, "[t]he land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land" (39). Leopold means that the environment consists of multiple elements that function as a whole ecosystem, each with its significance. Land is not simply soil but includes water, plants, and animals. Only with the inclusion of all these elements does land achieve its full ecological presence.

The major concern of eco-criticism is the symbiotic relation among all species, human and non-human, and the living and non-living things on earth. Eco-critic Fredric Suresh states: "The modern ecological consciousness has the feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other" (47). Humans often destroy the animal world and nature to fulfill insatiable desires. They must understand that the earth belongs to all creatures for mutual existence. The human desire to accumulate wealth has created disharmony between humans and non-humans, inviting ecological risks. Donald Worster, in *The Wealth of Nature*, writes: "Besides losing so many of the larger animals, we have lost entire ecological communities, complete landscapes, and with them have lost a considerable range of human feelings" (5). This highlights the urgency to preserve nature and protect animals, as unchecked human exploitation can make the earth an unfavorable place for human habitation. Lyn White claims: "Formerly man had been a part of nature, now he was the exploiter of nature" (8). White accuses humans of being hostile to nature, intoxicated with the power to control everything on earth. Benton adds: "Members of other animal species and the rest of non-human nature urgently need to be protected from destructive human activities" (149), emphasizing co-existence. Eco-theorist William Rueckert states: "The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds

upon which the two communities - the human, the natural - can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (107). Human survival depends on animals and vegetation. Exploitation of these resources jeopardizes human existence.

The equal relationship between humans and other species is often neglected. Kate Rig points out: "All human beings meanwhile remain interwoven, albeit often invisibly, with the life of countless non-human beings, who continue as best they can pursue their own ends in the midst of an increasingly anthropogenic environment" (4). The human-non-human relationship is essential for harmonious existence, though human intrusion endangers animals. Peter Singer, in *Animal Liberation*, argues: "If the argument for equality was sound when applied to women, why should it not be applied to dogs, cats, and horses" (28)? Singer asserts that animals have rights to live and enjoy the earth just as humans do.

Eco-critical theorist Paul W. Taylor proposes bio-centric egalitarianism, emphasizing respect for all elements of nature, as everything has a purpose. Animals and plants are equally entitled to coexist in the ecosphere. Humans must conserve them for the ecosystem's benefit. Every living thing has intrinsic value, essential for proper ecosystem functioning. Taylor argues that humans should see themselves as equal members of the earth community: "Every living thing is a teleological center of life, depending on the healthy biological functioning of others" (76). Bio-centric egalitarianism refutes human superiority and envisions a world valuing all living things.

The researcher reviews this research work with the interrelated literature by keeping the research questions and objectives in mind. Other researchers identified natural and human world separately that lacks harmony and co-existence. In doing so, the study makes an organized review of the primary concepts and theoretical approach of eco-criticism to identify the research gap which needs to be fulfilled. It also reviews the criticism of writer and the primary texts: *Tortilla Flat*.

Tortilla Flat has gained startling reputation that led many researchers to focus on it as a primary subject of literary analysis. The broad use of this story by researchers from various perspectives indicates that various references can support this research. Many previous researchers have applied the theory that will be utilized in this study, providing valuable assistance. Consequently, this research draws on several prior studies for support, as well as other sources like relevant articles and books. Siti Dwi Novita in her thesis examines the signs of a depressed mental illness in one of the characters in *Tortilla Flat*, she writes. "Danny suffers from stress disorder in the form of depression caused by his problems after receiving a home inheritance" (Abstract). She focuses on psychoanalytical aspects of the main character. Danny is unaware about the houses that he inherited but when he knew all of sudden he suffers from depression regarding the problems he had been facing. Similarly another researcher Urszula Niewiadomska in his research article writes about human nature. Human nature is to find pleasure in simple things and they want more from society. He relates,

...a man frequently survives, but does not succeed. Most likely passions survive as they expect a lot from society and they themselves only pursue simple pleasures. However, in the long run they do not succeed as they do not sacrifice anything treasure in the name of society's pleasure. (33)

The writer says it is difficult to get pleasure for long run when a person has not contributed anything for the sake of society' pleasure. He means to say that if one works for society then he finds pleasure in long run.

Christian Troy Roemer in his thesis entitled *Finding Steinbeck's Utopia in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat* writes, *Trotilla flat* as Marxist point of view. He finds though the plot is not about

the workers but can be interpreted through Marxist perspective. There is clear distinction between poor *paisanos* who does not own their house like Danny's friends and who owns house like Danny himself. He relates:

Tortilla Flat is not a story about workers, however the novel displays a profound appreciation for the poor *paisanos* and reverence for their more simple and pure lifestyle. Steinbeck creates a communist community that exists in Danny's household, and the friends become the image of what a more egalitarian society could entail outside of the restrictive confines of capitalism. (32)

Steinbeck in the novel *Tortilla Flat* creates a communist community presenting the main character as the owner of the two houses in the same time his other friends as homeless. One has two houses as material possession and others have nothing. This kind of character's presentation creates communist community. To continue further Lauren Valerie LePera opines different thought in her thesis according to her there is not any kind of communist community. They have dismantled their capitalist interest and sought the important necessities of their survival which was wine. She writes; "Danny and his friends dismantle the capitalist desire for personal wealth and seek only the vital necessities for their survival mainly wine. Any number of goods can be exchanged for wine" (17). It shows alcoholic nature of main character, Danny and his other friends. They are so much attached with alcohol since they are ready to exchange with any valuable goods for the sake of wine. Michael Thomas Naceasserts states that the novel's shape, at its core, is a creation of the pure spirit of early human laughter, a creation that goes beyond the visceral, exhalable spirit that constitutes our immediate sense of humor. He relates:

Tortilla Flat is a comic novel explicitly constructed on spectacle one mishap or malfeasance almost systematically leads into the next. Consistently throughout this string of comic spectacles, the interior conditions of the novel's heroes fuel the comedy of the extrinsic spectacle; without the reader gaining access into the inner realities of the characters, the contradictory, deluded, and sometimes absurd external reactions of the heroes would not function comically. (21)

In this case, even the narrator serves to heighten the comedy, built specifically on spectacle, one disaster or act of wrongdoing nearly always leads to another. The internal circumstances of the novel's heroes continuously provide energy to the comedy of the extrinsic spectacle; in the absence of the reader's access to the inner realities of the characters, the heroes' inconsistent, delusional, and occasionally ridiculous outward reactions would not function comically. Another researcher Natalia Rud has written about man's relationships with property in the novel *Tortilla Flat*. She writes "from his childhood Danny preferred not to be burdened with his social status and the responsibilities of a man of property. He selected, most likely intuitively, careless and adventurous lifestyles with fewer responsibilities" (9). The above notion is understood from the perspective of ownership, where a single, insignificant detail the purchase of real estate can upend a person's entire way of life. The superficial interpretation of the work as lighthearted and enjoyable depictions of the lives of *paisanos* is seen. He views the property as one of the novel's main pillars. In another research article Mohammed and Abdul Karim discuss that, despite the striking uniformity that is both thematically and structurally unified, the issue of depravity and deprivation contained in *Tortilla Flat* cannot be easily apprised. The characters are presented as simultaneously naive, primitive, careless, compassionate, and vicious. Characters are distinguished by their carefree lifestyle, love of freedom, and idealism, all of which are accompanied by a negative attitude toward property and loneliness. They relate: "the most striking episode in *Tortilla Flat* bringing out at once the primitiveness of behavior for honour and virtue in the *paisanos* is that relating to the attempted stealing of the Pirate's savings by Big Joe and its ultimate resolution" (202).

John Steinbeck consistently fascinated both in national and international level since this novel was published. A review of relevant literature reveals that their works have been examined from numerous angles, including eco-criticism. However, there has been limited discussion on the symbiotic relation among human, animal and land. While some critics have touched on these issues, they have not thoroughly defined, identified, explored, or analyzed these ideas. This research aims to address this gap by examining Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* from an eco-critical perspective. It focuses on the interconnected relation among human, animal and land.

In this way, various researchers have studied the Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* from various prominent perspectives including social, political, and economic lenses. However, there is a growing need to explore his works from an eco-critical standpoint to better understand how his depiction of nature and environment speaks to current ecological concerns. As a researcher, I have not found any study from the perspective of an eco-critical focusing on ecological consciousness. This area is the demanded research to show the ecological consciousness and relations among human animal and the nature in the novel *Tortilla Flat* that attracts symbiotic relation among land, animals and humans with the sense of equality. Therefore, this research work endeavors to analyze from that perspective.

Justification of the Study

This study is justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, it fills a critical gap in Steinbeck scholarship by applying ecocritical perspectives to a text often analyzed only through social, psychological, or Marxist lenses. By focusing on the interconnection between humans, animals, and the environment, the research offers a nuanced understanding of Steinbeck's ecological vision and contributes to the growing field of eco-literature studies. Practically, the study is significant in raising awareness about ecological consciousness and ethical environmental behavior. In an era of environmental crises, analyzing literature that exemplifies sustainable living, reverence for nature, and communal interdependence can inform contemporary attitudes toward ecological responsibility. Furthermore, the study underscores how literature serves not only as a reflection of society but also as a medium for shaping ethical engagement with the natural world.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative method to analyze John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* through the theoretical lens of ecocriticism, focusing on the interrelationship between humans, animals, and the natural environment. Relying on extensive library research, guidance from the supervisor, and critical insights from ecocritics such as Peter Singer, Paul W. Taylor, Aldo Leopold, and Lawrence Buell, the study uses published books, journal articles, authentic websites, and relevant dissertations as secondary sources. While earlier studies of *Tortilla Flat* largely emphasize its comic tone, social life of the paisanos, or human-centered concerns, they often neglect the ecological dimension of the novel, treating the human and natural worlds as separate entities lacking harmony. By contrast, this research highlights Steinbeck's ecological consciousness and identifies the novel's portrayal of coexistence, interdependence, and ethical relations among humans, animals, and land, thereby addressing a critical research gap and contributing a new perspective to Steinbeck studies.

Textual Analysis

Since the dawn of civilization, humans have relied on the natural world for food, clothing, shelter, and other essential resources. Humans instinctively depend on the sun, air, water, plants, animals, land, minerals, and other elements of nature. The energy that powers our cells, the nutrients that compose our bodies, and the ecosystem services that purify our water and air all come from

the natural world. In *Tortilla Flat*, John Steinbeck vividly portrays humans' dependence on nature. Through observation and reflection on the harm humans cause to the environment, Steinbeck promotes a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This harmony is illustrated through three key elements: embracing a holistic ecological perspective, leading a simple life, and demonstrating reverence for nature. These elements are intricately woven into the narrative and the characters' lives, reflecting Steinbeck's ecological vision.

Firstly, Steinbeck's depiction of the paisanos' life illustrates a holistic ecological perspective, recognizing humans as an integral part of the natural world. He emphasizes that humans and nature are symbiotic and inseparable components of the biosphere. In *Tortilla Flat*, the adventures of the paisanos highlight the surrounding landscape to underscore the unity of humans and nature:

Monterey sits on the slope of a hill, with a blue bay below it and with a forest of tall dark pine trees at its back. The lower parts of the town are inhabited by Americans, Italians, catchers and canners of fish. But on the hill where the forest and the town intermingle...these are the paisanos. (3-4)

Monterey becomes part of the characters, presenting their lives from a holistic perspective. Details such as trees, hills, and the shoreline help readers understand the paisanos' interdependent relationship with their environment. Paul Pojman and Louis Pojman note, "Deep ecology is egalitarian in that everyone and everything is equally valuable as part of the whole...find our deepest fulfillment in harmony with nature" (216). This perspective emphasizes the intrinsic value of all life and encourages coexistence rather than domination. The diverse group of misfits, gamblers, and drunkards in *Tortilla Flat* illustrates the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. Steinbeck portrays Monterey's natural elements stones, trees, and mountains as inseparable from the paisanos. Danny and his friends experience life alongside the sun, shoreline, and wildlife, reflecting a deep connection to their environment. Steinbeck emphasizes community and ecological thinking: "...when you speak of Danny's house you are understood to mean a unit of which parts are men, from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy" (3). This bond mirrors ecological principles where humans are part of a larger, interdependent system. Frederick Turner notes that the "natural man" often lives in alignment with innate instincts rather than societal norms (46). The paisanos, however, form a community bound by shared survival needs, illustrating the interconnectedness of life and community as part of ecological thinking. Characters like Pilon demonstrate spiritual appreciation for nature: "Pilon was a lover of beauty and a mystic. He raised his face into the sky and his soul arose out of him the sun's afterglow" (18). Nature refines and enlightens their souls, guiding them toward selflessness. Paul Taylor writes, "[W]hen we adopt the attitude of respect for nature as an ultimate moral attitude we commit to live by certain normative principles...to govern our treatment of the natural world" (180). Steinbeck shows that humans must interact responsibly with nature, acknowledging its intrinsic value. Nature provides joy, companionship, and spiritual nourishment. The woods filled with black cypress pine trees offer Danny and his friends a retreat to relax and find happiness: "It was purple dusk, that sweet time when the day's sleeping over and the evening of pleasure and conversation has now begun...The gulls flew lazily home to the sea rocks" (17). Lynn White Jr. observes, "What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship" (12). In *Tortilla Flat*, nature provides food, shelter, and solace, reflecting the characters' eco-centric lifestyle. Pilon advises his friends, "I go to the woods to have out my sleep. I counsel you come too. It will be well if Danny does not see us for a little while" (38), showing the forest as a sanctuary. Danny himself is influenced by nature: "When the sun was clear of the pines, and the ground was warm, and the night's dew was drying on the geranium leaves, Danny came

out on his porch to sit in the sunshine and to muse warmly of certain happenings" (39). Cheryll Glotfelty writes, "All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (XIX). *Tortilla Flat* highlights this interconnection, illustrating how culture, community, and the environment are intertwined. The harmonious coexistence is also expressed through the Pirate, a mentally handicapped man with five dogs, who receives refuge from the paisanos. In return, he contributes food he obtains through charity: "Every morning long before his friends awake, the Pirate arose from his corner and, followed by his dogs, he made the rounds of the restaurants and the wharves...They began really to live" (54-55). This reciprocity embodies Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic: "All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise; that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts" (238-39). Ethics in *Tortilla Flat* emerge from cooperation and mutual support rather than competition.

Secondly, Steinbeck emphasizes a simple lifestyle as central to harmony with nature. The paisanos are unaffected by commercialism and modern systems: "The Paisanos are clean of commercialism, complicated systems of American business, and having nothing that can be stolen, exploited or mortgaged...ancestors have lived in California for a hundred two years" (4). They lead simple lives, sharing resources, enjoying nature, and remaining content without wealth or power. Danny's ownership of two houses exemplifies simplicity and non-attachment; even when Pilon burns one house, Danny mourns briefly but does not succumb to anger, prioritizing spiritual over material wealth (12). Albert Schweitzer notes, "the man who has become ethical...exists in the world is itself significant for the world" (173). Danny embodies this reverence for life, living ethically within his community. The community shares property and resources, including the Pirate's dogs, illustrating ecological equilibrium. Taylor observes, "the ecological relationships between any community of living things and their environment form an organic whole of functionally interdependent parts" (185). This interdependence ensures sustainability and resilience, fostering mutual support and ecological awareness.

Steinbeck critiques modern conveniences through their emptiness. For instance, the vacuum given to Sweets Ramirez lacks a motor, symbolizing the futility of materialism: "Torelli says he bought a sweeping machine from Pilon and hooked it up to his light wire, it wouldn't work. So he looked on the inside, and it had no motor" (83). Even in illness, Danny receives support from the whole of *Tortilla Flat*: "They are going to give big party for Danny...everyone is going" (142). This sense of camaraderie underscores that humans are inseparable from the community and the land. Bill Devall and George Sessions argue, "ecological consciousness is the search for a more objective consciousness and state of being through an active deep questioning and meditative process" (232). The paisanos' mindful, harmonious living exemplifies ecological consciousness, demonstrating that happiness and well-being are rooted in connection with both nature and society.

Thirdly, Steinbeck emphasizes reverence for nature as life-sustaining. The paisanos' routines reflect their appreciation for the environment: "Pablo and Pilon in their blue jeans and blue shirts walked in comradeship into the gulch behind the house, and after a little time they returned to sit in the sun on the front porch to listen to the fish horns on the streets" (21). Nature provides physical sustenance, joy, and spiritual enrichment. Even at night, its beauty comforts and revives them: "The night came down as they walked into the forest...A high fog covered the sky, and behind it the moon shone so that forest was filled with gauze-like light" (60). Paul Taylor emphasizes that ecological relationships form "an organic whole of functionally interdependent parts" (185). The paisanos live in alignment with this principle, relying on the natural flow of the sun instead

of clocks: "Clocks and watches are not used by the paisanos of Tortilla Flat...there was the great golden watch of the sun. It was better than a watch, and safer" (116). Arne Naess notes that understanding humanity's dependence on responsible environmental behavior provides justification for preserving ecosystems (227). Steinbeck's characters embody this awareness, valuing community, simplicity, and mutual care. Beyond mere survival, the paisanos' connection with nature nurtures creativity, reflection, and emotional well-being. Festivals, fishing trips, and shared meals not only sustain their bodies but also cultivate bonds with each other and with the natural environment. By blending human life seamlessly with ecological rhythms, Steinbeck presents an ideal model of environmental ethics one that balances material needs with spiritual and communal fulfillment.

In sum, *Tortilla Flat* presents an ecological vision in which humans, nature, and community coexist in interdependent harmony. Steinbeck's characters embody holistic awareness, simplicity, and reverence for the natural world, offering timeless lessons about the importance of environmental responsibility, ethical living, and mutual care. The novel suggests that true fulfillment emerges not from material accumulation or domination over nature, but through mindful interaction with our surroundings, shared resources, and appreciation of life's intrinsic beauty. Steinbeck's ecological consciousness remains as relevant today as it was in his time, reminding readers that the health of human society and the natural world are inextricably linked.

Conclusion

In conclusion, John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* powerfully illustrates the theme of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Through the simple yet meaningful lives of Danny and his friends, the novel demonstrates how human existence becomes more fulfilling when it is closely tied to the natural environment. Living in the hills above Monterey, the paisanos embrace a life free from materialism, finding sustenance, joy, and peace in the beauty and rhythm of the natural world. Their daily lives follow the cycles of nature, revealing a symbiotic relationship where the land provides for them, and in return, they respect and value its presence. Steinbeck highlights that while the paisanos may appear poor in material wealth, they are rich in human connection, friendship, and spiritual contentment. By prioritizing companionship, generosity, and respect for their surroundings, they embody a philosophy of life rooted in simplicity, balance, and ecological awareness. Through vivid depictions of landscapes and heartfelt portrayals of characters, Steinbeck invites readers to recognize the timeless value of living in harmony with nature. Ultimately, *Tortilla Flat* offers an enduring lesson: that compassion, peace, and true happiness emerge not from material possessions, but from coexistence with the natural world and the bonds we form within it.

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