

A Study of Satire in the Works of John Steinbeck

*Generative Context, Artistic
Construction and Contemporary
Significance*

by

Ronggen Zhang

**A Study of Satire in the Works of John Steinbeck: Generative
Context, Artistic Construction and Contemporary Significance**

by **Ronggen Zhang**

2026

Ethics International Press, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by Ronggen Zhang

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (Hardback): 978-1-83711-838-0

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-83711-839-7

Table of Contents

Preface	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Research Background and Significance	1
1.2 Review of Domestic and Foreign Research Status	6
1.3 Research Object and Core Texts	19
1.4 Research Ideas and Methods	33
1.5 Research Framework and Innovations	39
Chapter 2: The Generative Context and Intellectual Foundation of Steinbeck's Satirical Art	42
2.1 The Historical Context: Contradictions and Crises in 20th- Century American Society	42
2.2 Personal Experiences: Practical Experiences and Ideological Accumulation	55
2.3 Literary Tradition: Inheritance and Innovation	62
2.4 Ideological Foundation: The Integration of Humanism and Social Criticism	69
Chapter Summary	83
Chapter 3: Core Manifestation Dimensions of Steinbeck's Art of Satire	87
3.1 Satire on Social Reality: Exposure and Criticism of Unjust Orders	87
3.2 Satire on the Predicament of Human Nature: An Examination of Desires and Weaknesses	115

3.3 Satire on the Conflict Between Ideals and Reality: The Deconstruction of Illusory Hopes.....	137
Chapter Summary	160

Chapter 4: Narrative Strategies and Expressive Techniques of Steinbeck’s Art of Satire 163

4.1 Character Portrayal: Types and Functions of Satirical Characters	163
4.2 Plot Construction: The Design and Development of Satirical Situations	188
4.3 Language Expression: Characteristics and Techniques of Satirical Language	207
4.4 Symbolism and Metaphor: The Transmission of Deep Satirical Meaning	231
Chapter Summary	246

Chapter 5: The Evolution and Textual Differences of Steinbeck’s Satirical Art..... 248

5.1 Early Works (1930s): The Sharpness and Realistic Pertinence of Satire	249
5.2 Mid-Career Works (1940s): The Diversity and Humanistic Depth of Satire	272
5.3 Late Works (1950s): The Complexity and Philosophical Implications of Satire.....	291
5.4 Analysis of the Driving Forces Behind the Evolution of Satirical Art.....	309
Chapter Summary	340

Chapter 6: The Literary Value and Contemporary Significance of Steinbeck’s Satirical Art	343
6.1 The Core Value to Steinbeck’s Literary Creation.....	343
6.2 Its Unique Position in American Literary History	376
Chapter Summary	414
Chapter 7: Conclusion	417
7.1 Main Research Findings	417
7.2 Research Limitations and Shortcomings	429
7.3 Future Research Prospects	434
Summary	437
Works Cited	442

Preface

In the galaxy of 20th-century American literature, John Steinbeck stands out as a Nobel Prize-winning writer with distinctive insight and profound philosophical depth, leaving behind timeless classics including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men* and *East of Eden*. Renowned for his sharp observation of social reality, sincere concern for the underprivileged and vivid artistic expression, Steinbeck has long drawn extensive academic attention focused on his realism, ecological thoughts and humanistic sentiments. While scattered discussions on his satirical art exist, systematic and comprehensive research on this core literary technique remains scarce, leaving a prominent gap in Steinbeck studies.

Against this academic backdrop, this book centers on the theme of Satire in the Work of John Steinbeck, aiming to explore the generative logic, expressive dimensions, narrative strategies, evolutionary path and dual value of his satirical art, build a complete research framework, and offer a fresh perspective for Steinbeck scholarship. As a literary device blending critical spirit and artistic appeal, satire is a key medium for writers to engage with society and reflect on humanity. Steinbeck's satire is far from simple mockery; it integrates in-depth exposure of social flaws, complex examination of human nature and unwavering commitment to humanistic ideals, forming a unique trait: sharp criticism intertwined with tender compassion, and realistic focus paired with philosophical reflection.

His satire operates on multiple levels: it acts as a blade targeting chronic social ills such as capital exploitation, power corruption and social prejudice; it serves as a mirror reflecting human greed, indifference and blindness; and it functions as a beacon conveying

longing for justice, equality and ecological harmony through critical reflection. This layered satirical art is a core feature of his writing and a key reason his works remain universally resonant across time. However, existing research fails to fully unpack this trait: foreign scholarship mostly focuses on single works or isolated satirical devices, lacking holistic analysis of its evolution; domestic studies often attach satire to thematic or stylistic research, without treating it as an independent research object for systematic theoretical and textual analysis. This gap creates broad research space for this book.

The research originates from long-term attention to Steinbeck's unique satirical art. Repeated reading of his core works confirms that satire is not an incidental technique, but a core narrative logic and ideological carrier running through his entire career. His satirical art evolves clearly: early works like *Tortilla Flat* feature gentle, humorous satire on lower-class life; mid-career masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* presents panoramic critical satire on systemic oppression; late work *East of Eden* delves into philosophical satire on human good and evil and family destiny, maturing alongside social changes and his personal ideological growth.

This evolution manifests in the shift of satirical targets from specific social phenomena to abstract humanistic propositions, the diversification of satirical techniques, and the deepening of connotations from realistic criticism to philosophical speculation. Adopting the logical thread of "generation-expression-strategy-evolution-value", this book breaks through existing research limitations, clarifies the contextual and ideological roots of his satire, analyzes its core dimensions and narrative strategies, traces period-specific textual differences and evolutionary drivers, and highlights its literary and contemporary value.

Structured into seven chapters with a rigorous and coherent framework, the book balances theoretical depth and close textual analysis. Chapter One serves as the introduction, sorting out research background, significance and domestic and international scholarship, identifying the lack of systematic research on Steinbeck's satire as the core research gap. It defines six core novels—*Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery Row*, *The Pearl* and *East of Eden*—as research objects, and outlines research ideas, methods, framework and innovations, laying a solid foundation for the whole study.

Chapter Two explores the generative context and ideological foundation of Steinbeck's satirical art from four perspectives: social context, personal experience, literary tradition and ideological core. Rooted in 20th-century American social crises—including the Great Depression, class polarization and ecological decline—his satire draws rich realistic materials. Personal experiences such as rural life, war correspondence and ecological fieldwork shaped his stance of standing with the underclass and examining reality with empathy. Inheriting American realistic and local color literature's satirical traditions while absorbing European literary nutrients, his satire combines regional specificity and inclusiveness, with humanism and social criticism as its ideological backbone.

Chapters Three to Five constitute the core research section. Chapter Three constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework for satirical expression: social reality criticism (targeting unfair economic and political systems and social prejudice), human predicament reflection (exposing human weaknesses), and ideal-reality conflict (deconstructing the illusory American Dream and pursuing genuine values), fully presenting the richness of his satirical connotations. Chapter Four analyzes narrative strategies from character portrayal,

plot design, language style and symbolism, showing how diversified techniques integrate critical power and artistic perfection, achieving unity of ideology and artistry. Chapter Five traces the evolutionary trajectory across early, middle and late creative periods: early satire is sharp and reality-focused; mid-career satire adds humanistic warmth and allegorical depth; late satire shifts to philosophical complexity, driven by social changes, personal ideological maturity and artistic self-breakthrough.

Chapters Six and Seven conclude and sublimate the research. Chapter Six elaborates the literary value and contemporary significance of Steinbeck's satirical art: it enhances the depth of his personal creation and innovates American realistic satirical tradition, while its criticism of social injustice and reflection on human nature retain strong enlightening meaning for contemporary society. Chapter Seven summarizes core findings, acknowledges research limitations including limited text selection and single research perspective, and proposes future directions such as expanding text scope, adopting interdisciplinary perspectives and conducting cross-cultural comparisons.

This book's innovations lie in three aspects: an independent research perspective treating satire as a core object, a systematic "generation-expression-strategy-evolution-value" framework, and in-depth exploration of ideological and philosophical connotations via interdisciplinary analysis. The writing process has been a journey of reinterpreting Steinbeck's works and advancing academic exploration, revealing that the enduring vitality of his satire stems from "criticism with care"—criticizing social ills to convey hope, reflecting on humanity to uphold justice.

It should be explicitly noted that during the entire research and writing process of this monograph, artificial intelligence tools were solely used for auxiliary academic support, including efficient literature retrieval, standardized academic citation sorting and annotation, as well as partial non-core academic text polishing (AI-polished) to optimize language fluency and formal expression. All core academic viewpoints, theoretical construction, textual analysis, research logic and innovative conclusions of this book are independently completed and solely owned by the author, and the author takes full academic responsibility for the entire content. AI only plays a supporting role in mechanical and repetitive academic sorting and language polishing, without participating in any creative academic research and judgment, which is in strict compliance with relevant academic ethics and norms.

In contemporary society, despite changed social contexts, the pursuit of justice, equality and human harmony remains a universal goal, making Steinbeck's satirical art a still-relevant mirror for examining reality. Admittedly, due to limited academic capacity, this book has imperfections, and sincere academic criticism and suggestions are welcome. It is hoped that this research will stimulate more scholarly attention to Steinbeck's satirical art and promote deeper development of Steinbeck studies.

Finally, the author sincerely thanks supervisors, academic colleagues, relatives and friends for their support and guidance, and pays highest respect to John Steinbeck for his immortal literary legacy that inspires endless reflection on reality and humanity.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

1.1.1 Research Background

John Steinbeck, a preeminent 20th-century American realist writer, captured decades of acute social strife in the U.S.—from the Great Depression’s devastation to post-WWII value shifts and California farmworkers’ struggles—weaving temporal anguish and human conflict into enduring classics like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men*, *East of Eden*, *The Pearl*, *Cannery Row*, and *Tortilla Flat*. Awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature for "realistic and imaginative writings combining sympathetic humor and keen social perception," Steinbeck’s work merges unflinching reality with probing inquiries into social order and human nature (Benson). His literary legacy transcends historical documentation, resonating today through its advocacy for justice, defense of human dignity, and attention to ecological balance.

Steinbeck scholarship has evolved into a diverse academic landscape, initially centered on social criticism, framing him as a voice of proletarian or protest literature. Mid-to-late 20th-century scholars, drawing on Marxist criticism, analyzed his exposure of capital exploitation, class oppression, and ecological crisis (Fang 29; Qu and Zhang 141). With the rise of ecocriticism, feminism, and postmodernism, research expanded: Xu Xiangying (200) explored ecological holism in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*; Ach (156) examined highway ecology in *The Grapes of Wrath*; Cai (22) traced the evolution of Steinbeck’s gender views; Mo (41) unpacked

contradictory portrayals of women in *The Chrysanthemums*; Chen Liping (99) analyzed religious imagery in *The Grapes of Wrath*; Tian (78) mapped his syncretic religious consciousness; Chen Junsong (88) studied mythic naturalism and poetic language; and Chaloupka (403) investigated intersubjectivity in *Of Mice and Men*. Comparative, translation, and adaptation studies further broadened this scope: Liu Su et al. (63) contrasted Steinbeck with Pearl S. Buck; Xu Ziwei (17) compared *The Grapes of Wrath* to Yu Hua's *To Live*; Čerče (67) explored *Of Mice and Men* translations; Trupej (119) analyzed racial translation strategies; Botelho and Dudalski (74) compared film adaptations of *Mice and Men*; and Fowler and U'Ren (56) discussed *Tortilla Flat*'s screen adaptation.

Despite this breadth, satire—a core artistic technique in Steinbeck's oeuvre—remains understudied, mentioned only sporadically in analyses of social criticism or narrative craft. Cumberland (14) noted satirical echoes between *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* but did not elaborate on Steinbeck's satirical forms; Ren (79) referenced satire of the relief system in *The Grapes of Wrath* without deep analysis; Allington (317) linked *The Pearl*'s popularity to its satire of greed but stopped short of systematic framework; Tang (58) touched on satirical metaphor in *The Pearl* in passing; Brown (107) and Lei Jiadi (40) made fleeting references to satire in *Of Mice and Men*; Mullaney (41) noted gender satire in *Cannery Row*; and Ganieva Orzigul et al. (1376) referenced social satire in the same work. These studies treat satire as a secondary argument, lacking analysis of its forms, artistic characteristics, ideological core, narrative strategies, and evolutionary trajectory.

Satire is Steinbeck's primary tool for social criticism and human reflection, integrated with realist principles to form a distinct style. It sharpens exposure of social injustice, interrogates human frailty, and

affirms justice, equality, and dignity (Benson). In *The Grapes of Wrath*, he satirizes capitalist land annexation, hypocritical relief systems, and monopoly exploitation through the Joad family's migration (Tydal 33; Piao and Huang 90). *Of Mice and Men* uses the contrast between George and Lennie's land dream and harsh reality to satirize the American Dream's illusion and the working class's inescapable fate (Brown 11; Song 86). *East of Eden* satirizes human greed, selfishness, and hypocrisy through the Trask and Hamilton families' moral struggles, exploring free will and moral responsibility (Čerče 431; Mohan et al. 2233). *The Pearl* critiques greed's corruption of human nature via Kino's tragic transformation (Sarr 78; DeMott 94). *Cannery Row* satirizes societal norms of "normalcy" while celebrating working-class solidarity (Mullaney 41; Lee 175). *Tortilla Flat* mocks capitalist materialism through the paisano brothers' simple life, yearning for uncorrupted humanity (Qu 130; Lee 175). Satire pervades Steinbeck's core works; understanding it is essential to grasping his ideological depth and artistic power.

Steinbeck's satirical art emerged from a confluence of social context, personal experience, and literary tradition. His career coincided with seismic American change: the Great Depression displaced millions of farmers (Kombiényi et al.; Deng), WWII brought economic growth but also inequality and moral decay (Potter et al. 183; He Ying 66), and Cold War conservatism stifled dissent. These realities provided fertile ground for his satirical critique. Born to a middle-class Salinas Valley family, Steinbeck worked farms and ranches in his youth, witnessing working-class struggles firsthand (Benson), and his journalism career honed his observational and critical skills (He Xiacong 345). His interest in biology and ecology inflected his satire, extending its focus to human-nature relations (Xu Xiangying 111; Levy 8). Steinbeck inherited America's satirical tradition—from Mark Twain and O. Henry—yet forged a unique voice: his satire is more tragic than

Twain's humorous wit, more socially engaged than O. Henry's playful irony, and shaped by European naturalism's focus on social determinism (Tian 10; Xie 15; Wang 2007).

Contemporary Steinbeck scholarship has entered an era of refinement and diversification, yet satirical art remains a critical gap. Advances in literary satire theory—Burke's dramatic theory, Abrams' classification, Frye's structural analysis—provide a framework for systematic study. This research, centered on Steinbeck's core works, aims to fill this gap by examining the generative context, expressive dimensions, narrative strategies, and literary value of his satirical art. It will deepen understanding of realist literature, uncover the interplay between satire and realism, and offer new perspectives for realist criticism.

1.1.2 Research Significance

1.1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

First, this study fills a critical gap in Steinbeck scholarship. No domestic or foreign research has centered satire as an independent object of study or constructed a comprehensive framework for its analysis. This work will integrate scattered observations on Steinbeck's satire, synthesize existing research, and analyze its forms, characteristics, and ideological connotations, enriching the Steinbeck academic system.

Second, it advances the practical application of literary satire theory. While satire theory is well-developed, Steinbeck's unique fusion of realism and criticism—his satirical tone of "sorrow for misfortune and anger at resignation," his blend of sharp directness and subtle symbolism, and his multi-layered critique of society, human nature, and ecology (Benson; Allington 317; Tang 58; Xu Xiangying 200; Fang

29)—offers a vital case study. This research will test satire theory's explanatory power and expand its scope through analysis of Steinbeck's distinctive style.

Third, it broadens the study of realist literature. As a foundational realist writer, Steinbeck innovated artistic techniques while upholding realism's core tenets. Satire is central to his realist project, yet existing scholarship underemphasizes its role in realist criticism and human reflection. This study will reveal how satire amplifies realist literature's critical force and artistic appeal, exploring how Steinbeck integrated ecological, religious, and feminist ideas into his satirical craft to expand realism's expressive range.

Fourth, it deepens understanding of literature's social function. Steinbeck's satire is rooted in specific historical contexts, responding to and critiquing social reality. This research will explore how historical events, intellectual trends, and social contradictions shaped his satirical art, and how his satire influenced public consciousness and social progress (Ren 79; Tydal 33). It will illuminate literature's role as a mirror of society and a catalyst for change.

1.1.2.2 Practical Significance

First, it enriches interpretation of Steinbeck's works. While his writing is seemingly accessible, its satirical layers and ideological depth are often overlooked. Systematic analysis of his satire will help readers uncover hidden meanings: for example, the contrast between George and Lennie's dream and its demise in *Of Mice and Men* (Brown 11; Song 86), or Elisa's constrained ambition in *The Chrysanthemums* (Mo 41; Lei 118). It will deepen appreciation of his critique of society, human nature, and the ideal-reality divide.

Second, it offers a model for contemporary literary creation. Many contemporary writers struggle with one-dimensional satire, lacking realist grounding or humanistic care. Steinbeck's example—his fusion of factual accuracy and critical force (Fang 29; Qu and Zhang 141), his balance of sharp critique and compassion (Benson; Ren 79), and his diverse satirical techniques (Chen Junsong 88; Chaloupka 403)—provides a blueprint for impactful, nuanced satire.

Third, it informs literary education and criticism. Steinbeck's works are staples of American literature curricula, yet teaching often neglects satire, limiting students' understanding of his artistic and ideological complexity. This study will provide analytical frameworks for teaching satirical elements in works like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Pearl*, enhancing literary appreciation skills. It will also offer new methods for literary criticism, applicable to other realist and satirical writers.

Fourth, it prompts reflection on contemporary social issues. Steinbeck's satirical targets—inequality, class oppression, ecological crisis, moral decline—remain pressing today. Analysis of his satire on capital exploitation (Kombiényi et al.; Piao and Huang 90), human alienation (Brown 107; Lei Jiadi 40), and ecological destruction (Xu Xiangying 200; Ach 156) will foster critical engagement with modern society, while his humanistic care and advocacy for justice offer guidance for addressing these challenges.

1.2 Review of Domestic and Foreign Research Status

1.2.1 Foreign Research Status

Foreign Steinbeck scholarship emerged in the 1930s with the publication of *Tortilla Flat* and *Of Mice and Men*, evolving into a

multidisciplinary field spanning literature, sociology, ecology, history, and translation studies after *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and his Nobel Prize. Research has followed a trajectory from social criticism to diverse perspectives to in-depth refinement, yet satire remains marginalized, analyzed only fragmentarily.

1.2.1.1 Research on Social Criticism and Historical Context

Social criticism is a foundational theme in foreign Steinbeck studies, framing his works as historical archives of 20th-century America. Scholars analyze his engagement with the Great Depression, class conflict, racial discrimination, and policy change, with satire appearing only as a secondary tool of critique. Kombiéni et al. analyze *The Grapes of Wrath*'s portrayal of class control during the Great Depression, noting satirical depictions of bankers' dehumanization of farmers, landowners' starvation wages, and performative government relief—satire that exposes capitalism's systemic exclusion of the working class through the contrast of realist representation and logical absurdity. De Vries (193) uses *The Grapes of Wrath* to critique capitalist food systems, highlighting Steinbeck's satire of "hunger on fertile land" and the paradox of technological progress alongside human alienation. Bouacida and Lahmar (99) compare *Of Mice and Men* to Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*, noting implicit satire of racial segregation in Crooks' exclusion—his broken hand, solitary living, and unequal treatment—exposing racism's distortion of human nature through realistic contrast rather than direct polemic. Trupej (119) references satirical racial elements in *Of Mice and Men* translations, showing how ideological differences shaped translators' handling of Steinbeck's critique, confirming its social intervention value. Bowman (37) examines *The Grapes of Wrath*'s reception in 1930s FSA camps, noting that satirical depictions of bureaucratic relief systems resonated with migrant experiences and prompted policy

reflection. Tydal (33) explores the work's Armed Services Editions, revealing how the military weakened its capitalist satire to emphasize national unity—evidence of its realist pertinence. Scholars have also explored satire through eugenics and political economy: one study analyzes *Of Mice and Men*'s satire of 20th-century American eugenics via Lennie's labeling as "useless," critiquing the movement's pseudoscience and inhumanity; another uses economist James Buchanan's interpretation to unpack satire of labor commodification in *The Grapes of Wrath*, where California landowners treat migrants as disposable tools. Despite this depth, satire is never central, viewed merely as a means to social criticism ends.

1.2.1.2 Research on Ecological Thought and Naturalism

Ecocriticism has made Steinbeck's ecological reflections a major research focus, with scholars uncovering rich ecological ethics in *Cannery Row*, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Satire of anthropocentrism appears in these analyses but is subsumed within ecological and naturalist frameworks. Ach (156) constructs a "highway ecology" framework for *The Grapes of Wrath*, analyzing satirical depictions of stray animals, roadkill, and desertification—criticism of humanity's destruction of nature and self-destructive survival logic, epitomized by the Joads' run-over turtle. Levy (8) re-examines *Cannery Row*'s ecological thought, noting satire of humanity's utilitarian treatment of nature through the contrast between Doc's reverent engagement with marine life and cannery owners' overfishing. Hale (17) places *Of Mice and Men* in evolutionary and socialist utopian context, satirizing utopian ideals of natural harmony through George and Lennie's dream disillusionment—an echo of naturalism's emphasis on environmental determinism. Boman (287) explores *Of Mice and Men* from a psychiatric perspective, satirizing capitalism's distortion of human

nature via the ranch owner's greed, Curley's brutality, and Lennie's tragedy—reflecting naturalism's focus on social environment. Lee (175) combines Schopenhauer's voluntarism with ecocriticism in *Cannery Row*, satirizing humanity's willful conquest of nature through overfishing and profit-seeking, aligning with Schopenhauer's view of desire as the source of suffering. Flodin (139) uses Adorno's art theory to analyze animal suffering in *Of Mice and Men*, satirizing human "moral superiority" through Lennie's unintentional harm to small animals and societal neglect of non-human life—linking species discrimination to ecological crisis. These studies reveal Steinbeck's ecological insights but fail to recognize satire's independent artistic and ideological value.

1.2.1.3 Research on Character Images and Thematic Ideas

Character and theme are traditional hotbeds of Steinbeck scholarship, with deep analyses of core figures (George, Lennie, Curley's wife, Ma Joad, Kino) and themes (the American Dream, good and evil, loneliness, alienation). Satire is used to explain character tragedy and thematic critique but lacks independent status. Čerče (85) analyzes Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men*, satirizing patriarchal oppression through her namelessness, performative coquetry, and societal labeling as a "loose woman"—the contrast between her emotional needs and external judgment forming the core of Steinbeck's critique. Bashar et al. (95) deconstruct Curley's wife through Derrida, satirizing patriarchal gender binaries by breaking the "virtuous wife/loose woman" dichotomy, exposing the absurdity of gender stereotypes. Massala and Mesi (12) identify the American Dream's collapse as *Of Mice and Men's* core theme, satirizing its illusion through George and Lennie's land dream—their hard work futile under Great Depression class solidification, with Lennie's innocent longing for rabbits and tragic death sharpens the critique of the American Dream's false

promise. Sarr (462) analyzes *The Pearl's* "wealth dream," satirizing capitalism's materialism through Kino's transformation from a humble fisherman to a violent, greedy man—the pearl's shift from hope to disaster a powerful metaphor for wealth's corruption of happiness. Ismael and Saleh (51) explore misogyny in *East of Eden*, satirizing patriarchal good-evil binaries through Cathy's "evil" portrayal and male characters' fear of women—criticizing the simplification of female humanity. Browne (610) uses reification theory to analyze *The Grapes of Wrath*, satirizing capitalism's dehumanization through the Joads' treatment as disposable burdens by bankers, landowners, and even fellow migrants. Ramani (89) compares carnivalesque elements in *Tortilla Flat* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, satirizing capitalist materialism through the paisano brothers' hedonistic yet loyal life—their existence a counter to mainstream success norms. Reinking (15) traces intertextuality between Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" and *Of Mice and Men*, noting Steinbeck's inheritance of Burns' satirical tradition of unfulfilled plans—George and Lennie's dream, like the mouse's nest, a fragile construct destroyed by reality. These studies deepen understanding of Steinbeck's characters and themes but reduce satire to an interpretive tool, not an object of study in its own right.

1.2.1.4 Research on Narrative Techniques and Textual Intertextuality

Narratology has shifted foreign Steinbeck scholarship to focus on how he conveys meaning through form, with interdisciplinarity (intertextuality, translation, adaptation) expanding its scope. Satirical expression and transmission are discussed but not systematized. Chaloupka (403) analyzes *Of Mice and Men's* narrative strategy, noting how limited perspective and dialogue ellipsis amplify satirical subtlety—George's perspective evokes empathy for Lennie and

foreknowledge of dream disillusionment, creating "informed anxiety" that deepens satirical tragedy; Curley's wife and Lennie's fragmented dialogue offers multiple interpretive layers for satire. Botelho and Dudalski (74) compare *Of Mice and Men's* literary and film versions, showing how psychological satire in the text (George's doubt) is translated to visual satire in film (long shots of empty land and insignificant characters), retaining the core critique while creating a unique cinematic effect. Čerče (67) explores *Of Mice and Men* translations, noting that Steinbeck's satire relies on colloquial, dialectal language—Lennie's childlike speech, for example, creates a powerful contrast with his harsh environment—and that translators must balance linguistic purity and contrast to preserve satirical impact. Trupej (119) compares socialist and post-socialist translations of *Of Mice and Men's* racial satire, finding that socialist translators amplified it for ideological critique while post-socialist translators neutralized it—revealing satire's contextual complexity. Andrews (131) traces *Of Mice and Men's* critical history, noting that 1930s critics focused on social criticism and tragedy, 1970s feminists and ecocritics highlighted gender and anthropocentric satire, and 21st-century scholars offer interdisciplinary satirical readings—reflecting satire's historical contingency. Faria and Hatje-Faggion (53) analyze three Portuguese translations of *Of Mice and Men*, showing how colloquial dialogue (George's exhortations, farmworkers' chats) forms satire through the contrast of plain language and cruel reality, with translator choices directly shaping reader perception of this critique. Barden (90; 93) explores Cannery Row's intertextuality with Monterey's real history, satirizing commercialization's erosion of local culture through the literaryization of real figures (Edward Ricketts) and events (cannery rise and fall)—the idealized literary Cannery Row a stark contrast to the commercially degraded real one. These studies explore satirical form and transmission but frame it as a servant of narrative, not a shaper of it.

1.2.2 Domestic Research Status

Domestic Steinbeck scholarship began in the 1980s with post-reform and opening-up translations of *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *East of Eden*, evolving from introductory summaries to multi-dimensional interpretation. It has passed through three stages: enlightenment (1980s–1990s: translation, theme, biography), expansion (2000s–2010: ecocriticism, feminism, religious metaphor), and deepening (2010–present: refinement, interdisciplinarity, comparison). Core themes include thematic ideas, character images, artistic characteristics, translation, and cross-cultural comparison, yet systematic satirical research remains absent, with only scattered mentions.

1.2.2.1 Research on Thematic Ideas

Thematic analysis is central to domestic Steinbeck studies, focusing on social reality, human nature, ideal-reality conflict, and ecological crisis. Satire appears in critical theme analysis but not as an independent focus. Fang (29) addresses "The Steinbeck Problem"—the dialectic of social criticism and humanistic care—noting satire of capitalism in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* that is not total negation but a complex "sorrow for misfortune and anger at resignation," critiquing injustice while sympathizing with the working class. Chen Qijia (148) links Steinbeck's tragic themes to poverty, satirizing capitalist society's rationalization of poverty—attributing it to individual laziness rather than institutional oppression. Cui Huan (2011) analyzes *The Grapes of Wrath*'s ecological thought, satirizing anthropocentrism through land desertification and species death—humanity's short-term economic greed leading to homelessness, a karmic satirical ending. Dong Huiqiang (2017) explores the "Monterey Trilogy"'s ecological holism, satirizing industrialization's "human conquest of nature" through Monterey residents' harmonious

coexistence with nature—progress at the cost of ecological balance. Zi Bowei (2023) applies eco-Marxism to *The Grapes of Wrath*, satirizing capital's dual exploitation of humans and nature—economic development alongside ecological destruction leading to a dual crisis. Dai Wenchun (15) analyzes good and evil in *The Grapes of Wrath*, satirizing the suppression of good and condoning of evil through the Joads' mutual aid and capitalists' exploitation—capitalism's superficial advocacy of justice masking institutional evil. Chen Liping (99) explores religious imagery in *The Grapes of Wrath*, satirizing religious institutional hypocrisy through the Joads' Exodus-like migration—religion's promise of salvation unfulfilled in the face of human suffering. Xu Ziwei (17) compares *The Grapes of Wrath* to Yu Hua's *To Live*, noting that Steinbeck satirizes capitalist oppression while Yu Hua satirizes historical fate's unpredictability—both sharing sympathy for the working class and defense of human dignity. Liu Su et al. (63) contrast Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* with Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, satirizing capitalist materialism and feudal ethical restraint respectively—their satire shaped by distinct social contexts. These studies reveal rich thematic layers but treat satire as a means of theme expression, not an independent artistic phenomenon.

1.2.2.2 Research on Character Images

Domestic scholars offer multi-dimensional analyses of Steinbeck's core characters, exploring their traits, symbolism, and thematic resonance. Satire is used to explain character fate and social criticism but lacks independent analysis. Cai (22) traces the evolution of Steinbeck's gender views through Elisa (*The Chrysanthemums*), Ma Joad (*The Grapes of Wrath*), and Cathy (*East of Eden*), satirizing patriarchal restraint through Elisa's unfulfilled gardening talent and independent spirit—her confinement to the wife role a critique of women's suppressed potential. Cai (229) further analyzes Cathy in

East of Eden, satirizing patriarchal demonization of women through her "evil" portrayal—her rebellion and independence framed as sin, a critique of gendered moral judgment. Lei Jiadi (40) explores loneliness in *Of Mice and Men*'s character group, satirizing capitalist alienation through George, Lennie, and Crooks' isolation—social oppression reducing human connection to economic self-interest. Zhao and Chang (61) analyze Steinbeck's focus on the working class, satirizing social injustice through the Joads and farmworkers' hard work and unending suffering—the imbalance of effort and reward a core critique. Song Jianguan (86) applies binary opposition to *Of Mice and Men*, satirizing social rigidity and human distortion through good/evil, wealth/poverty, and freedom/bondage—capitalism's equation of wealth with superiority and freedom with self-interest a root cause of injustice. Zhao Xuqin (47) analyzes Crooks in *Of Mice and Men*, satirizing racial segregation through his marginalization—equal labor yet unequal treatment, a critique of racial injustice. Liu Hui (97) uses archetypal criticism to analyze *Of Mice and Men*'s "dreamers," satirizing modern society's "loss of home" through George and Lennie's land dream disillusionment—material pursuit eroding spiritual belonging. Fu Hao (2014) explores the "family dream" in *Of Mice and Men*, satirizing capitalism's deconstruction of family through George and Lennie's longing for connection and their lonely reality—capital expansion breaking traditional family structures and leaving the working class adrift. These studies unpack character complexity but reduce satire to a tool of character shaping and social criticism.

1.2.2.3 Research on Artistic Characteristics

Domestic research on Steinbeck's artistic characteristics focuses on narrative technique, symbolism, language, and structure, with satire mentioned only in passing as one technique among many. Chen

Junsong (88) analyzes Steinbeck's fusion of mythic naturalism and poetic language, noting how poetic concision and emotional tension amplify satire—Lennie's simple rabbit dream contrasting with his tragic death, the purity of language and cruelty of fate deepening satirical tragedy. Fan Lin (154) explores Steinbeck's diverse writing styles, noting his combination of humor and satire—Cannery Row's absurd depictions of Doc and the residents offering "tears in laughter" critique of mainstream values. Tian Junwu (50) analyzes Steinbeck's poetic language, noting its implicitness and symbolism in deepening satire—the grape in *The Grapes of Wrath* symbolizing both hope and suffering, its dual meaning a satirical comment on hope's disillusionment that requires close reading to unpack. Duan and Chen (732) analyze core images in *The Grapes of Wrath* (grapes, dust, highways), noting the grape's satirical reversal—California's promised abundance giving way to migrant hunger and poverty. Tong Xindan (64) explores animal imagery in *Of Mice and Men* (mice, rabbits, dogs), satirizing dream fragility through the contrast of rabbits (Lennie's purity and hope) and mice (reality's cruelty). Zhao Yang (65) analyzes the pearl's metaphorical evolution in *The Pearl*, satirizing wealth's corruption of human nature through its shift from hope to disaster—Kino's pursuit of a better life leading to violence and death, a critique of wealth's false promise of happiness. Fan Lin (84) explores Steinbeck's suggestive endings, noting how ellipsis amplifies satirical resonance—*Of Mice and Men*'s sunset riverbank ending, without direct critique, deepening the tragedy of dream disillusionment and social satire. Cao and Ding (144) analyze *The White Quail*'s dramatic structure, satirizing patriarchal marriage through the contrast of a husband's neglect and a wife's care for the quail—her emotional investment in the bird a compensation for marital emptiness. Jiang Lu (41) compares *The Chrysanthemums* to Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss*, noting Steinbeck's use of environment and psychological description in satire, while Mansfield uses detail

and symbolism—both critiquing women's lost self-identity. Yang Yu (187) compares *The Chrysanthemums* to Ling Shuhua's *Embroidery Pillow*, satirizing patriarchal suppression of women's talent and feudal ethical restraint respectively—their satire shaped by distinct cultural contexts. These studies analyze Steinbeck's artistic craft but treat satire as a secondary technique, not a unique artistic system.

1.2.2.4 Research on Translation and Reception

With translation studies' "cultural turn," domestic scholars have explored Steinbeck's dissemination in China, focusing on translation strategies and reception contexts. Satirical transmission is discussed but not centered. Zhou Dandan (2015) traces Steinbeck's Chinese translations (1949–1976), noting that ideologically influenced translators amplified social criticism and satire while weakening humanistic connotations—*The Grapes of Wrath*'s "satire of capitalism" translated as "criticism of the exploiting class," simplifying the original's complex satire. Zhang Ke (2007) reviews 1940s translations, noting that progressive intellectual translators framed Steinbeck as an anti-fascist, anti-capitalist voice, retaining satirical critique in colloquial language to convey working-class suffering. Guo and Zhao (80) analyze *The Grapes of Wrath*'s Chinese reception, noting that its social criticism and satire resonated with Chinese readers' cultural psychology, particularly their sympathy for the working class and critique of unjust systems, driving its widespread dissemination. Ou et al. (173) link Steinbeck's Chinese reception to social context, noting that post-1980s modernization challenges (inequality, ecological crisis) made his satirical critique of these issues highly relevant to Chinese readers and scholars. Shang Yuan (2023) analyzes Liu Qingbang's adaptation of Steinbeck's group concept, noting that Liu drew on Steinbeck's working-class portrayal and social satire but localized it to Chinese modernization—Steinbeck's

capitalist critique becoming a critique of human alienation, reflecting satire's cross-cultural adaptability. Zhou Dianwen (80) notes that *The Grapes of Wrath's* stream of consciousness and satire attracted Chinese scholars, but cultural differences led to misinterpretation of its religious metaphorical satire, requiring Western cultural contextualization. These studies explore satire's cross-cultural transmission but focus on translation and reception processes, not satire's inherent characteristics or value.

1.2.3 Research Gaps and Limitations

Steinbeck scholarship has achieved remarkable breadth after nearly a century, yet satirical art remains a critical gap, lacking a systematic, holistic framework. Four key limitations emerge:

First, lack of systematic, independent satirical research. Domestic and foreign studies treat satire as a secondary element—an appendage to social criticism, ecological thought, character analysis, or narrative craft. No research has centered satire as an independent object, sorting its forms, characteristics, ideological core, or narrative strategies. Discussions are superficial: for example, scholars mention *The Grapes of Wrath's* satire of relief systems but do not explore its form (direct vs. implicit), characteristics (sharp vs. subtle), or differences from satire in other works. This fragmentation prevents a comprehensive understanding of Steinbeck's satirical art.

Second, insufficient exploration of satirical ideological connotations. Existing research frames satire as a critical tool, ignoring its integration with Steinbeck's humanism, social criticism, ecological ethics, and philosophy. His satire is not mere ridicule but a holistic critique of society, human nature, and the ideal-reality divide, paired with a commitment to dignity, justice, and ecological harmony. Of

Mice and Men's satire of the American Dream, for example, is also a grief-stricken critique of a system that denies human happiness and anxiety about pure humanity's survival in a cruel world. The Pearl's satire of greed is a warning against materialism's erosion of spiritual life and an inquiry into human integrity amid desire. Scholars fail to explore these connections, reducing satire to a superficial critical device and missing its profound ideological value.

Third, lack of historical perspective on satirical evolution. Steinbeck's career (1930s–1950s) spanned seismic American change—the Great Depression, WWII, the early Cold War—and his ideological and creative development shaped a distinctly phased satirical style. Early works (*Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*) feature sharp, direct satire of specific social realities, aligned with his "social protest" identity and acute Great Depression contradictions. Middle works (*Cannery Row*, *The Pearl*) shift to implicit, diverse satire of human nature, integrating ecological thought with symbolic and carnivalesque techniques, reflecting his mature creative vision and deepened ecological insights. Late works (*East of Eden*) offer profound, restrained philosophical satire of good and evil and free will, reflecting his later-life philosophical reflection. Existing research does not examine this evolution in relation to his career or historical context, lacking a dynamic understanding of satire's development and its interplay with social context and personal thought.

Fourth, single research methods and lack of interdisciplinarity. Satirical discussions rely on traditional text analysis, lacking integration with literary satire theory, narratology, sociology, philosophy, and ecology. Scholars identify satirical elements through plot, character, and language analysis but do not use Burke's dramatisitic theory, Abrams' satire classification, or Frye's structural theory to interpret it systematically; they do not combine narratology to analyze

how perspective, dialogue, and structure shape satirical effect; they do not use sociology to link satire to social structure and movement; and they do not use philosophy to unpack its philosophical connotations. This methodological narrowness limits the depth and breadth of satirical analysis—for example, Burke's theory could illuminate the "act-scene" contradiction in *The Grapes of Wrath* (migrant survival vs. institutional oppression), and ecological philosophy could deepen understanding of Cannery Row's anthropocentric satire.

These gaps provide a clear research direction: this study will center Steinbeck's six core works, apply literary satire theory and interdisciplinary methods to systematically analyze his satirical art—its forms, characteristics, ideological connotations, evolution, and value—filling critical gaps and advancing Steinbeck scholarship.

1.3 Research Object and Core Texts

1.3.1 Definition of the Research Object

This study's core object is the satirical art of John Steinbeck's literary creation. In literary terms, satirical art is not merely a rhetorical device but a creative system where writers, through profound social insight and human reflection, use irony, exaggeration, contrast, symbolism, and metaphor to critique social contradiction, human frailty, and ideal-reality conflict. As the core carrier of Steinbeck's realist vision, his satirical art inherits Western literature's critical spirit while integrating unique humanistic care and historical context, forming a style with both realist pertinence and artistic appeal. Based on core text analysis and existing research, Steinbeck's satirical art is defined by five interrelated dimensions: forms of expression, artistic

characteristics, ideological core, narrative strategies, and evolutionary trajectory.

1.3.1.1 Forms of Expression of Satirical Art

Steinbeck's satirical expression is diverse and targeted, focusing on three core dimensions tied to historical context and textual theme:

Satire of social reality and institutional injustice: The core of his early and middle satire, embodying his "social protest" identity. *The Grapes of Wrath* satirizes Great Depression capitalism, land annexation, and relief systems through the Joads' migration—bankers' dehumanization of farmers, landowners' starvation wages, and performative relief forming a critique of systemic oppression (Kombiéni et al.). *Of Mice and Men* satirizes class solidification and social indifference through farmworkers' lives—the ranch as a closed, hierarchical microcosm where workers are "imprisoned" in their class and denied emotional connection (Čerče 85). *Tortilla Flat* satirizes bourgeois utilitarianism, and *Cannery Row* mocks commercialization's erosion of local culture (Mullaney 41), extending this critique to diverse social contradictions.

Satire of human predicament and frailty: As his career progressed, Steinbeck's satire shifted from society to human nature, critiquing greed, selfishness, conformity, and their role in individual and social tragedy. *The Pearl* is a quintessential example, satirizing materialism through Kino's transformation—his humble desire for a better life curdled into greed, suspicion, and violence, leading to the loss of his wife, child, and happiness (Sarr 462). *East of Eden* satirizes human "evil instinct" and moral choice through the Trask family's struggle—Cathy's evil and Aron's purity forming a contrast, with Cal's internal conflict revealing human complexity, critiquing patriarchal binary good-evil thinking (Ismael and Saleh 51). Lennie's "innocent evil" in