

Excerpts from John Steinbeck



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Our species is the only creative species and it has only one creative instrument, the individual mind and spirit of a man. Nothing was ever created by two men. There are good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group can build and extend it, but the group never invents anything. The preciousness lies in the lonely mind of a man.

EAST OF EDEN

Thus, in talking with a naval officer who had won a target competition with his naval, we asked, "Have you thought what happens in a little street when one of your shells explodes, of the families torn to pieces, a thousand generations influenced when you signaled Fire?" "Of course not," he said. "Those shells travel so far that you couldn't possibly see where they land." And he was quite correct. If he could really see where they land and what they do, ... he would not be able to perform his function ... And he is too humble to take the responsibility for thinking. The whole structure of his world would be shaken if he permitted himself to think. The pieces must stick within their pattern or the whole thing collapses and the design is gone. We wonder whether in the present pattern the pieces are not straining to fall out of line; whether the paradoxes of our times are not finally mounting to a conclusion of ridiculousness that will make the whole structure collapse. For the paradoxes are becoming so great that leaders of people must be less and less intelligent to stand their own leadership.

THE LOG FROM THE SEA OF CORTEZ

Our men were being sent in without guns. Troopships were sunk and the government wouldn't tell us. The German army was so superior into ours that we didn't have a chance. That Kaiser was a smart fellow. He was getting ready to invade America. But would Wilson tell us this? He would not. And usually these carrion talkers were the same ones who had said one American was worth twenty Germans in a scrap - the same ones.

EAST OF EDEN

(Sounds familiar)

FOOD FOR TASTE

The wheel turns only two ways, left or right. The fact of the lag, and the boat swinging rapidly so that a slow correcting allows it to pass the course and err on the other side, becomes a maddening thing when Tony the magnificent sits beside you. He does not correct you, he does not even speak. But Tony loves the truth, and the course is the truth.

THE LOG FROM THE SEA OF CORTEZ,

In his bedroom he broke open a new box of shells and put one of them in the cylinder of his well-called Smith and Wessen .38 and he set the loaded chamber one space to the left of the firing pin.

His horse standing sleepily near the fence came to his whistle and stood drowsing while he saddled up.

It was three o'clock in the morning when he dropped the letters in the post-office at King City and mounted and turned his horse south toward the unproductive hills of the old Hamilton place.

He was a gallant gentlemen.

EAST OF EDEN

(Uncle Tom (of John Steinbeck) is heading for death.)

Major Hunter was an engineer, and except in case of war no one would have thought of giving him command of men. For Major Hunter set his men in rows like figures and he added and subtracted and multiplied them. He was an arithmetician rather than a mathematician. None of the humor, the music, or the mysticism of higher mathematics ever entered into his head. Men might vary in height or weight or color, just as 6 is different than 8, but there was no difference otherwise. He had been married several times, and he did not know why his wives became very nervous before they left him.

MOON IS DOWN

I guess it sounds kind of funny to you folks, but I always like to look down there and think how quiet and easy a man could live on a little place.

PASTURES OF HEAVEN