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Steinbeck's Writings III: The New York Years

Kiyoshi Nakayama.

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516 pp + index Paper \$36.36

Reviewed by Kyoko Arika

In March, 2002, Kiyoshi Nakayama published *Steinbeck's Writings III: The New York Years*, thus completing his remarkable trilogy of Steinbeck research. The first of his series, *Steinbeck's Writings: The California Years* (1989), deals with Steinbeck's writings from his early days up to 1939; the second, *Steinbeck's Writings: The Post California Years* (1999) covers his work from 1940 to 1949. The last focuses on his writings in his final two decades, 1950–1968.

In his introduction, Nakayama explains: "This volume aims to be an all-around study of all the works Steinbeck completed in his New York years except for those published only in newspapers or magazines. In other words, the ultimate goal of this book lies in reexamining his works in the 1950s and 1960s to discover the legacy Steinbeck left us as an American writer."

Steinbeck's Writings III: The New York Years consists of nine chapters, dealing with one work in each chapter: *Burning Bright*, *Zapata*, *East of Eden*, *Sweet Thursday*, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, *Travels with Charley in Search of America*, *America and Americans*, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*. Chapters usually begin with the background of the work and then turn to criticism and Nakayama's discussion of each work. What is most helpful to the reader is that, unlike the former two works in the series, there is a works cited section at the end of every chapter.

The first chapter, devoted to *Burning Bright*, examines causes of the play-novelette's failure, providing a list of the detailed changes Steinbeck made to the typescripts of the play version. Because the typescripts belong to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library in Columbia University and are not easily accessible, his approach is a great help to the Japanese reader.

Chapter two compares the film *Viva Zapata!* and Steinbeck's treatment, "Zapata: A Narrative, in Dramatic Form, of the Life of Emiliano Zapata," while also making use of two other books that present the historical facts and political circumstances of Mexico in those days, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (1969) by John Womack Jr. and *Zapata: The Unconquerable* (1941) by Edgcomb

Pinchon. Nakayama persuasively concludes that *Viva Zapata!* praises the immortal spirit of Zapata who was sublimated into a folk hero.

Chapter three, a study of *East of Eden*, discusses two central themes—"retelling the story of 'Cain and Abel'" and "timshel"—to read the saga from the perspective of New Historicism. Comparing both the Hamilton and the Trask sagas with the historical facts, Nakayama contends that *East of Eden* reconstructs American history. Valuable for the Japanese scholar is the inclusion of an appendix of pages from Steinbeck's manuscript and typescript of *East of Eden*. Nakayama discusses the novel's key issues by comparing manuscript, typescript, and published text. This fine scholarship reflects Nakayama's extraordinary enthusiasm and untiring effort.

In chapter four, Nakayama maintains that "*The Winter of Our Discontent* should be regarded as an important novel next in rank after his masterpieces *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*." Tracing the negative criticism accorded *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Nakayama notes that "Just like *East of Eden* this novel deals with individual morality." The affluent society in the United States during the 1950s, says Nakayama, witnessed the rise of the Beat generation, engaged in rampant capitalism and commercialism, and suffered from social insecurity, political corruption, and moral decay. How individuals survive in this turbulent age, he contends, is a critical problem and a theme of the novel.

In chapter seven, *Travels with Charley in Search of America*, Nakayama prizes Steinbeck's adventurous spirit and sense of duty as an American. What charms the reader in this book, Nakayama insists, are the "poetry all through the essay, dreams, beauty, his attitude toward human beings, as well as his criticism of the contemporary American politics and society, and his view of American people."

Steinbeck's Writings III: The New York Years is a reliable study guide for scholars as well as college students. With the completion of this volume of the series, Steinbeck studies in Japan have made further progress, contributing greatly to our study of American literature.

KYOKO ARIKI is a professor of English at Okayama College; she earned her Ph.D. from Okayama University in 2000. She has published articles on Steinbeck and Willa Cather, is a co-translator of *East of Eden* (1999), and a co-editor of *Re-Reading John Steinbeck* (2001).