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STEINBECK TODAY

NATIONAL STEINBECK CENTER MOURNS GREER

KIM GREER, HEAD OF THE NATIONAL STEINBECK CENTER in Salinas since its inception eight years ago, died 28 March, 2006, at the age of 49. Greer had been an executive with Household International in Salinas when he first volunteered to aid the effort to construct the museum and cultural center. He was named president and chief executive officer in 1998, and he subsequently worked tirelessly to expand the Center's functions and resources. Thomas Steinbeck was quoted in the *Monterey Herald* as saying that Greer's "high regard for the traditions of literacy and education . . . are to be seen in the many and diverse programs instituted at the Center." These include an Agricultural Museum that celebrates the Salinas Valley's farming past and a young authors' conference that takes place annually. Jeff Gilles, chairman of the Center's board of directors said Greer "made a lasting contribution to Salinas." Greer received his baccalaureate degree in business administration from California State University Fullerton, and attended an executive education program at Michigan State. In interviews quoted in the *Herald*, Greer said that the Center always tried "to allow people to express how they feel and never take a viewpoint." "In this way," he said, "we become a place where all sides can be spoken." Greer also sat on the boards of the Salinas Oldtown Association, the Salinas Chamber of Commerce, and the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau. He is survived by his former wife, Kathy; his mother, Muriel; and his children Noelle (15) and Jackson (12).

— "Steinbeck Center CEO Greer dies," by Joe Livernois, *Monterey Herald* Salinas Bureau. Posted online on Wednesday, March 29, 2006: <http://www.montereyherald.com>

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Jane Smiley's *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), places Steinbeck in the company of those novelists who "have actively pursued Tolstoy's social program—the portrayal of those who can't or don't portray themselves, often in pursuit of a higher social goal. In this category I would put Sholokhov (*And Quiet Flows the Don*), Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*), Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*), Faulkner (*As I Lay Dying*), and Mistry (*A Fine Balance*) (146). While Smiley counts Steinbeck among those writers who inspired her when she was young, along with Virginia Woolf and Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness, she does not include Steinbeck on her list of favorite authors because she found the style of *The Grapes of Wrath* "too cloying" (219, 271).

— submitted by Martha Heasley Cox

ICELANDIC AUTHOR HALLDÓR
KILJAN LAXNESS (1902-1998)
WON THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR
LITERATURE IN 1955 FOR "FOR
HIS VIVID EPIC POWER WHICH HAS
RENEWED THE GREAT NARRATIVE
ART OF ICELAND"

Kevin Starr's recent *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), describes Carey McWilliams's *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (1939) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) as a "counterattack" on the Red Scare tactics of government and business groups:

Steinbeck had reported on conditions in the field for the *San Francisco News*. While he was not formally on the left, his depiction of vigilante action against Dust Bowl migrants, most dramatically the nighttime burning of a migrant encampment ("Hooverilles,"

such encampments were called), certainly positioned his protagonists, the Joad family of Oklahoma, against a sea of troubles caused by the hostile growers of the San Joaquin Valley. Because *The Grapes of Wrath* was so successful as a documentary novel, it was taken as literal truth. Even FDR referred to the Joads in one of his Fireside Chats as though they were actual people. On the other hand, Steinbeck outraged Oklahomans as well as Kern County growers with his depiction of the Joads and was denounced in the House of Representatives by a congressman from Oklahoma. (214)

Starr also notes Steinbeck's fascination with the tide pool and the non-teleological view of existence: "His characters are fascinated by animals and frequently compared with them. They also live communally—whether they are strikers, or the Joad family, or loafers on Cannery Row—and in such collectivity they achieve their finest moments and fullest definitions" (282).

— submitted by Martha Heasley Cox

TRAVELES WITH CHARLEY

When author James L. Haley and his publisher, Free Press, needed a title and epigraph for his history of Texas, they turned to Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley*. The title of the book became *Passionate Nation*, with the epigraph, "Like most passionate nations Texas has its own private history based on, but not limited by, facts."

— submitted by William Groneman

ADDITIONAL DIALOGUE

Jjasper Fforde has published four witty novels about an alternate world in which everyone is obsessed with literature and in which the heroine, Thursday Next, a Literary Detective, is dedicated to rescuing books and their characters from dastardly villains like Acheron Hades, who has gotten into *Jane Eyre* and kidnapped Jane (*The Eyre Affair*). In the third volume, *The Well of Lost Plots*, Thursday is hiding out in a pulp novel in the Well of Lost Plots, where the raw material for yet-unpublished books is hoarded. Thursday and Miss Havisham (of *Great Expectations*) encounter

a young man who “announced haughtily that he had been asked to write additional dialogue for John Steinbeck and strode off.” See *The Well of Lost Plots* (New York: Penguin, 2003) 103.

— submitted by Robert Morsberger