

[Book Review]

*The Philosophers of Monterey:
The Untold Friendship of John Steinbeck, Joseph Campbell & Ed Ricketts*
Michael Jerome Hanson, Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010

Lee, Geon-Geun
(Chosun University)

John Steinbeck, a Nobel Prize-winning author, wrote his third novel, *To a God Unknown*, in the light of Spinoza's pantheism against conventional anthropomorphic theism, and Joseph Campbell's mythology can give reason for the characters' mythical and outrageous behaviors.¹⁾ Also, behind such an academic analysis, as the writer revealed in a letter to his friend, Carlton Sheffield, the book weaved Steinbeck's first wife, Carol Henning's betrayal or romantic affair with Campbell, worthy of attracting attention from the town. However, outside Campbell's record kept through this period, there are few historical materials to talk about the triangular relationship.

Given this, Michael Jerome Hanson as a researcher of psychology and mythology, respecting Campbell, produced *The Philosophers of Monterey: The Untold Friendship of John Steinbeck, Joseph Campbell & Ed Ricketts*. Introducing his book as a complete fiction in the preface, Hanson says that he changed real people and events to suit the story's needs. However, the stories and backgrounds shown in this work are not different from those of other biological notes, such as Susan Shillinglaw's *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage* except for some insignificant

1) Geon-Geun Lee, "A Mythological Resistance Named Pantheism in John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*," *The Journal of Mirae English Language and Literature* 20.1, 2015, pp. 469-91.

additions or deletions, for example, the distortion of Carol's younger sister, Idell's contribution to the anecdotes to create another love triangle (the sisters and Joe) and no comment about Ritchie and Tal Lovejoy, who are important in forming this intelligent and philosophical play group.

Nevertheless, this book is valuable in that it treats the historical meeting of the three philosophers that are significantly influential in American modern culture: Steinbeck is one of the most widely loved writers in the world as well as America, Campbell is regarded as an innovator in comparative religious studies and mythology, and Ed Ricketts is a noted and pioneering marine biologist of his era (10). Although its demarcation between a factual record and a literary recreation is not distinct, and the development of plot is immature and obtrusive as an art, this book is useful and appealing as a guide to learning the three pioneers' thinking methods in their days of anonymity, beneficial to the students as well as the scholars in the academic fields of literature, psychology, mythology and biology.

The preface reveals that Hanson tries to illuminate Campbell's origin story of his becoming a myth, calling him my Joe and emphasizing his passion for the material of myth.

His message was always the same: there are universal parts of humanity that point to the larger mysteries of meaning, and those things show up in the stories we tell. Let's explore them together and share what we know to enrich each other along the course of our own lives. (14)

Also, Hanson does not conceal his intention to write the story of Campbell as a young man searching for the answer to the question of what love is. However, despite the author's thoughts, I cannot help being more concerned with the philosophical rendezvous.

Next, in Chapter One, the narrator Joe (Campbell) begins to stay with the Steinbecks and Ed Ricketts, meaning a significant interlude on his larger journey through the whole country. At the beginning of this novel, Joe leaves a noisy party of girls and wine, driving up Route 101 in California to find the questions of his life by himself. At this time, he has withdrawn from graduate studies for a Ph.D., not receiving faculty approval about his studying Sanskrit, Modern Art, and Medieval literature. In the meanwhile, fortunately, he happens to run into Adele, a close friend long before college. She is a painter who gives a breath of life to him, and her freewheeling lifestyle has a double-sidedness: She is not only happy, exploring, fun, vivacious, beautiful, but also dangerous, chaotic, destructive, erratic.

Adele, realizing that Joe has lost the joy in just being with a girl, introduces him to her sister Carol and a budding thirty-year-old writer, Steinbeck. At their first meeting, the two men share a holistic philosophy. Joe praises Steinbeck's earlier edition of *To a God Unknown* by mentioning the collective knowing, the universal psyche, the personified nature, and a multiplicity of living gods in nature. About this, Steinbeck corresponds to Joe in that nature is alive and the homestead in *To a God Unknown* is like a living tabernacle. Moreover, their common idea links Ed's non-teleological thinking method in that an absolute, fundamental purpose from God cannot control nature, including humans.²⁾ Joe believes that the story should be deepened with symbols because the naked truth is too high to take without a filter and insists that humans cannot escape their symbols. On the other hand, Steinbeck argues that realistic logo is preferable to mythic symbols because personal feelings and emotions can easily taint a book and nature does not know anything about human

2) I insisted this opinion at the 2015 Joint International Conference that was held in Chungnam National University on October 24.

consciousness. Meanwhile, beginning to live in the neighborhood of Pacific Grove near the Steinbecks, Joe has his sexuality turned to Carol because of her sincerity, steadiness, consistency, and evenness, not to mention her physical attractiveness, even tearing a letter of apology written to Adele, who still loves him. Next, the three characters become acquainted with Ed, whose marriage life is so stormy that his wife, Nan, leaves him with their three children. He runs a biological laboratory (a marine biology supply house) on Cannery Row, which attracts all sorts of visitors—writers, artists, musicians, prostitutes and bums like Mack and the boys in *Cannery Row* by Steinbeck. The place becomes where they can discuss philosophy, science, and art and have a lovely party.

Chapter Two starts with Ed's erotic temperament as in the episode where he is slapped across his face because he made love to both the beautiful women, and they are identical twins—Xenia and Tania and describes Joe's development of his ideas into his unique mythology helped by Spengler's, Jung's, and Jeffers's works. In the meantime, the three philosophers and two women (Carol and Adele) enjoy some activities: target shooting at the beach and Point Lobos, trips to Santa Cruz to collect specimens, hiking to Mount Toro. Their favorite dishes are turkey meatloaf, oyster stew and abalones. Especially, in the Ouija board experiment, sending messages to the netherworld, all the participants are frightened by a deep, angry voice. For example, Joe knocks over the candles while John grabs a nearby candleholder and cocks it overhead, ready to strike. The sound proves to be Ed's, but this scene shows the different attitudes between Joe and John toward the mysterious world.

As stated previously, besides letting the three men's philosophies meet each other, this book talks over another theme: the romantic relationship between Joe and Carol. Joe argues that sex and religion should be the same thing, and there is not the slightest difference between the erotic

and the mystical-tantric. Also, he emphasizes that the most fantastic poets in the history are heretic monks as if they were speaking to their Christian god, “Your love is not the highest. My earthly love for another human is” (87). To this, Carol responds, “The Greek gods conjure circumstances that always put us into trouble, almost like they make a situation for us to not be forgivable in” (93). In short, Joe seems to be like a man who loves a girl that he is meant to have married, and also Carol feels her marriage to John is unfit because of her husband’s tendency of monomania about writing. In fact, to Joe’s eyes, Steinbeck’s insistence on childlessness against Carol’s demand is distasteful and even justifying his affection to her. Nevertheless, Carol’s attitude to Joe’s love is not clear-cut and rather close to a virtuous wife. Furthermore, Joe infers that she would not be suitable to the lifestyle of New York if she should follow him.

The beginning part of Chapter Three introduces the illicit romance between Lancelot and Guinevere written in Campbell’s journal at four pages, certainly analogizing their star-crossed love story with that of the Round Table. In fact, Carol, when Joe kisses her, says, “John does not like to kiss. He never kisses me. Says his lips have no nerves” (108). Therefore, from another angle, Carol’s love for Joe is due to Steinbeck’s carelessness and inattention to her, meaning she may see her husband in Joe by imagining her ideal sexuality. That is, if she saw Joe in a different situation, such as in New York, she would not love him. However, at this time, Carol is the opiate, and Joe is the addict.

According to Susan Shillinglaw, at this time when Carol and John suffered, Joe spent his summer with Ed and was distracted by another lovely girl, Xenia Kashevaroff, Tal Lovejoy’s sister (115). Nevertheless, Hanson omits such a story in this book, and the fictional version is trivial. What is more important is that Ed reveals his philosophical views while

talking with Joe in front of Carol. The oldest man, Ed, says, “I’ve no concern for causes of things. All things are causes. You cannot suss it out, say it’s this particular thing or that particular thing. The only way to do that is to have a specific point of view. I do not want heroes and villains, problems and solutions. All that duality, same side of same coin stuff” (119). With this words, Ed argues his non-teleological attitude to natural phenomena, including Carol and Joe’s affair and even Steinbeck’s writing style containing duality. That is, he thinks that even though humans are likely to overvalue their own lives and experience, they, if going further, would know all is already in everything but do not realize it.

Next, this novel describes the last dialogue between Joe and Steinbeck. To Joe, whose chin sinks to his chest, Steinbeck says, “You should be the one to kiss her, Joe. Carol needs it. I have no nerves in my lips. I hate kissing” (125). Steinbeck accepts his relationship with Carol is not really marriage and suggests that Joe should take her heart with him. To this, Joe says he decided to drive to Los Angeles and leave her. And also, he laments the fact that a human being has to endure life because s/he cannot see the whole life and it is worth pity. After this, Carol tells Joe that Steinbeck needs her, and she would sacrifice herself to her husband’s writing, which is bigger than love.

On the other hand, Ed gives Joe his thoughts about their loneliness by saying this.

Misery is good, suffering is good. That’s the part the Buddhists got wrong. It’s only despair that hurts us. Hope with suffering is the greatest gift in the world. You’ve got to hit the bottom, Joe. It’s all a cycle. Up and down, and around. It’s a merry-go-round. . . . The perennial, collective part. We all contribute to one big psyche. Trouble is good. It shows things up. Integration is to follow the path through

pain. Well, what I need is pain. I'll put my hand directly into the flame.
(131)

These words of Ed's share positive views about human life with Nietzsche's eternal recurrence in that we humans should transcend what we are to achieve what we hope instead of just tolerating our sad realities because our destinies are not controlled by the absolute being. That is, Ed's non-teleology and Nietzsche's philosophy belong to a holistic monism that our reason and will are incorporated into our bodies, and our destinies are entirely dependent on how we live with our misfortunes, such as Ed's unhappy family life and Joe's lost love.

Lastly, I insist that Hanson's *Philosophers of Monterey* delivers Campbell's, Ricketts's and Steinbeck's ideas separately and comparatively using a literary device of unexpected romance between Joe and Carol. The author's artistic skill to write a literary work seems to be a little immature, but his creativity is remarkable in the attempt to observe the three pioneers' philosophies in different academic fields. Although this book still needs more explanation in a logical way, such a weakness is understandable considering the immensity of the three characters' abstract thoughts and the use of a literary style against the want of space.

❖ Reference

- HANSON, Michael J., *The Philosophers of Monterey: The Untold Friendship of John Steinbeck, Joseph Campbell & Ed Ricketts*, Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010.
- LEE, Geon-Geun, "A Mythological Resistance Named Pantheism in John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*," *The Journal of Mirae English Language and Literature* 20.1, 2015.
- _____, "A Non-teleology of *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*," 2015 *Joint International Conference: Globalizing the English Language, Literature and Culture in Asia*, 2015.
- SHILLINGLAW, Susan, *Carol and John Steinbeck: Portrait of a Marriage*, Reno, TX: U of Nevada P, 2013.

논문접수일: 2015년 11월 09일
심사완료일: 2015년 12월 08일
게재확정일: 2015년 12월 09일