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JOHN STEINBECK'S "DISCONTENT" OVER THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract:

John Steinbeck is an eminent representative of American literature in the 20th century, a Pulitzer Prize and Nobel Prize winner for his literary masterpieces. He has also contributed to the world literature with distinctive writing style and settings of his works. In the following article, social problems depicted in the novel "The Winter of Our Discontent" as main themes of the work is about to be analyzed thoroughly. In the piece of literary work, the author describes the adverse effects of societal pressure on the fate and feelings of people and common social problems that existed in America in the 20th century.

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1. Introduction

As Uzbek literary critic A. Ulugov states, *Good works are always created on the basis of writer's emotions or the experiences that bother him* [8]. John Steinbeck is one of American writers who wrote about the serious issues, life stories and people around them and expressed his views on the events in depth.

John Steinbeck, as an established writer, has added enough to the world literature and also considered to be one of the greatest writers in the 20th century and he is regarded as "quintessential American writer". In spite of being a modernist writer, John Steinbeck has well attained his unique position in American literature where literary giants like Ernest Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald dominated. In 1962 John Steinbeck was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature, the highest award for literary achievement.

2. Main part

As Luchen Li writes, "John Steinbeck: A Documentary Volume": *John Steinbeck was one of the most accomplished and widely read authors of the twentieth century. Today his books continue to sell millions of copies every year, both in and outside the United States. His themes cover a broad range of issues—social, political, cultural, moral, global, and environmental.... Contrary to the prediction of many influential critics that his popularity would decline after his death in the centenary of his birth, there were almost two hundred events in thirty-eight states [in America] honoring Steinbeck* [10].

John Steinbeck was a dynamic writer who started writing from his early years and gained popularity during his lifetime. His thoughtful ideas and unconventional style in narration brought him long-lasting fame in the literature. Most of his writings, John Steinbeck tend to present ethnic characterization and its cross-cultural identities. His distinctive writing style and settings of his masterpieces have attributed

new ideas to the world of literature. He expressed his ideas and thoughts so skillfully that it influenced and still influences a great number of writers and critics and they admire and imitate his unique style for their fictional writings of today's world.

John Steinbeck's works present ethnic characters whose identity is in crisis due to the conflict between cultures. Steinbeck's last works are autobiographical, questioning whether he succeeded in his life and did his roles well or not. "The Winter of Our Discontent" by John Steinbeck was published in 1961 was the last novel he wrote.

The novel gets its title from "Richard III", a play written by Shakespeare. In both works, desperation and greed are discussed. As a writer, Steinbeck is famous for writing about American society and societal issues. "The Winter of Our Discontent" "is not exception, where the desire for wealth and status, social pressure and guilt are described.

A major theme found in "The Winter of Our Discontent" is the effect of societal pressure. At the beginning of the novel, Ethan Hawley does not have job satisfaction while being employed as a grocery store clerk, Ethan's wife always urges his husband to reach higher social and economic status. His children also complain about their living conditions what triggers the protagonist Ethan to accept bribes and commit crimes in order to improve his power and wealth. Mary even insults Ethan, by stating, "... *I do blame you for sitting wallowing in it... Everybody's laughing at you. A grand gentleman with no money is a bum*" [11]. In this extract we can witness that his wife used to blame Ethan for not doing enough to improve their lifestyle like a big house and a luxurious car. Mary considers that only a larger paycheck Ethan gets can help them to achieve their ambitious dreams. Ethan becomes miserable because of the constant society's pressure to have ideal life with good fortune. He starts deceiving people, although he has never wanted to comply with immoral actions that are considered to be the norm in the American society.

Later in the novel, Ethan considers about a bank robbery and he could not act his plan because of some distractions. "*It was planned to the split second. At five minutes to nine I would place the broom in the entrance. I'd practiced over and over. Apron tucked up, scale weight on the toilet chain to keep it flushing. Anyone who came in would hear the water and draw his own conclusion. Coat, mask, cakebox, gun, gloves. Cross the alley at the stroke of nine... Pick up the money, put in cake box, cross alley, flush gloves and go on sweeping sidewalk, available and visible when the alarm came*" [11]. However he was not able to make plan work, Ethan's personality turn upside down that he went against his rules of his past life just to enhance his and his family financial state. Not only Ethan becomes too concerned and obsessed with money, but also his son too. "*Ethan's son, Allen, enters a patriotic essay contest, and he wins because he plagiarized the works and speeches of some of the most famous American figures and presidents*" [11]. His son takes part in contest and cheats to win materialistic prize. When Ethan discovers his son's immoral act, he realizes that his mistakes have affected his son's fate. Finally, his greed and wealth have influenced negatively his family members, he decides to commit a suicide.

Throughout the settings of the novel, Ethan commits terrible actions, including causing the deportation of his immigrant boss and possesses his property illegally stealing from boss's alcoholic friend Danny. Ethan gives Danny Taylor a thousand dollars despite what Danny says in this passage, "*You're betting that I'll put up my meadow as collateral. And you're betting that a thousand dollars' worth of booze will kill me, and there you'll be with an airport in your lap*" [11]. All Ethan cares about the economic status of his family, he is even willing to sacrifice his childhood friend Danny for that. He gives Danny the money being aware of that he would spend it all on alcohol, and if Danny dies of alcohol, it may help Ethan to own the patch of land in the town that is flat enough for an airport. As such, Steinbeck depicts in the novel, the lust for power and wealth that can lead to immoral schemes and bribery.

Another theme of "The Winter of Our Discontent" is American Dream. It means being happily married, having children, dwelling in an ideal house and making good fortune. Without money, Ethan

cannot live blissfully with his wife Mary who always complains his husband about trivial salary. Mary wants to own a decent amount of money to establish high life standards for her children. Surely, the theme of defining American Dream is evident in Mary Hawley, because she is happily married with children; however she desires to have a nicer house of their own and making larger fortune. He tries to explain his family “*money does not change the sickness, only the symptoms*” and that only “*money gets money*” [11], but they fail to realize that money they would have can never bring a true sense of happiness in their lives.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, John Steinbeck holds his strong position in American literature as well as the world literature. Although he is a great representative of the 20th century American literature, his works are still well received by readers and widely read throughout the globe. As his works often dealt with social and economic issues, social problems like societal pressure, immoral acts such as bribery, fraud and the adverse impacts of American Dream on the fate of people are dexterously described by John Steinbeck in “The Winter of Our Discontent”.

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