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**The Western Trip – a Tragedy – of Oklahoma
People in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath***

LUCRARE METODICO- ȘTIINȚIFICĂ

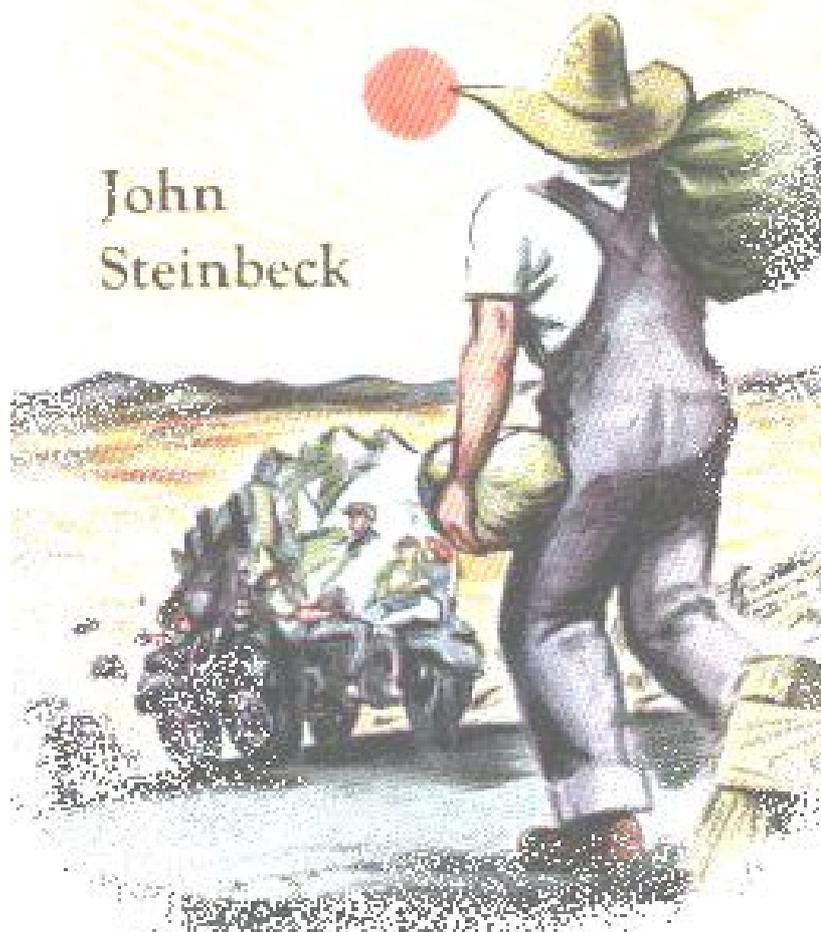
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The Grapes of Wrath

John
Steinbeck



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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
<i>I.</i> An Itinerary of Steinbeck's Life and Work	5
<i>II.</i> Steinbeck a Naturalist and Regionalist	14
<i>III.</i> The Paradise....Lost	23
<i>IV.</i> The Western Journey to California	53
<i>V.</i> Themes, Motifs and Symbols	61
Conclusions	65
Selective Bibliography	68



John Ernst Steinbeck
(1902 - 1968)

ARGUMENT

The motif of choosing this theme is quite simple. I grew up watching American movies, almost always with happy-end, dreaming about this kind of life, where anything may be possible, and developing in my mind the idea that Americans are the most blessed nation in the world, wishing to feel in this way. Reading Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, brought me inside of one major crisis of American people. Their history is familiar enough to me but never impressed me like Steinbeck's novel did. I had finished the novel and I needed time to assimilate it thinking on and on how unfair was the whole situation and how blessed I am after all. Because of the torrent of feelings that moved me reading this novel I chose it for my graduate paper work.

In the first chapter entitled **An Itinerary of Steinbeck's Life and Work** I presented the author's place of birth, places where he lived during his life, his origin and his parents and grandparents origin. I placed in this chapter Steinbeck's childhood, his special life friendship with Ed Ricketts, his attempt to become a newspaperman, and a succinct presentation of his writings, too.

In the second chapter **Steinbeck a Naturalist and Regionalist** I wrote about Steinbeck's diverse work in style and quality. He is a model example of the modern American nostalgia for the primitive, the counter-reaction to the triumphant urbanization of American culture which took place in the first half of twentieth century.

The Paradise ...Lost is the third chapter of my paper work. In this chapter is presented the suffering of Oklahoma people in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. While calamities of nature were robbing the soil of its fertility, equally inexorable human forces were thrusting the farmers off land. The Joad family drove away from their homes.

Chapter IV – **The Western Journey to California** – distinguishes the Joad family in their way to California longing for a better life but Tom's family meet with much hostility in this place. The camps are overcrowded and full of starving migrants, who are often nasty with each other. The locals are fearful and angry at the flood of newcomers, whom they derisively label "Okies".

In the fifth chapter I presented themes, motifs and symbols in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Some of them are: man's inhumanity to man, the dignity of wrath, the multiplying effects of selfishness and altruism. Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Chapter I

AN ITINERARY OF STEINBECK'S LIFE AND WORK

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr., was born February 27, 1902, in the agricultural trading center of Salinas, in a Northern Central California valley of the same name – one about two-thirds of the way from Los Angeles to San Francisco on the major highway closest to the Pacific coast.



Steinbeck's house

The valley famed for truck farming, is especially known for its lettuce and its broccoli. A powerful root of Steinbeck's inspirational vision rests – fittingly for a writer who has made such effective use of Christian allusions – in the Holy Land, to which the figure of prophetic stature in Steinbeck's immediate background, his paternal grandmother's father, took his family from Leominster, Massachusetts, in 1840s. Steinbeck writes with great admiration in *America and Americans* and in one of his "*Letters to Alicia*" of his farmer ancestor named Dickson who had been moved to convert the Jews to Christianity by teaching them agriculture.¹

Two of the Dickson (or Dixon) daughters met and married two brothers (from near Düsseldorf, Germany), in Jerusalem. They were visiting their sister and her husband, Lutheran missionaries. One brother was John Adolph Grosssteinbeck, John Steinbeck's grandfather, who brought his bride to United States. After first settling in New Jersey, the couple moved to Florida, where the novelist's father, John Ernst Steinbeck was born at St. Augustine. After being drafted into the Confederate Army during the Civil War, John Adolph moved back to his

wife's native Massachusetts and finally to Hollister, California, where he became a prosperous miller. Steinbeck's father followed the same trade and also served for eleven years as Monterey County Treasurer. In 1890, he married Olive Hamilton, the daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth, who had left Ulster (Northern Ireland) to settle in California in the 1850s. (The history of the Hamilton family, identified by their proper names, makes up a large part of the action of *East of Eden*.) Before marrying, Olive had taught school in several places, including the then isolated Big Sur, which was later to become Henry Miller's playground. John, the couple's third child, was the only son; his three sisters were named Esther, Elizabeth, and Mary.²

The boy became an avid reader, especially of the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy (particularly *The Return of the Native*); but his favorite work was Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. This work influenced him all his life and he worked at rendering it into a modern version. He contributed to the Salinas high-school newspaper, played on the baseball team, and served as president of the senior class of 1919. He enrolled at Stanford University as an English major, but left without a degree after attending classes off and on between 1920 and 1925, including a summer session in 1923 at Monterey's Hopkins Marine Station. Between periods in Palo Alto, he earned money at odd jobs. He also contributed light pieces to campus periodicals and was especially influenced by a creative writing teacher, Edith Ronald Mirrielees, for whose *Story Writing* Steinbeck provided a preface in 1962. At height of the "Big Boom", 1925, Steinbeck followed the crowd to New York City, where a brother-in-law helped him get a job as a laborer on the Madison Square Garden (since replaced by a post-World-War-II structure). In "The Making of a New Yorker", Steinbeck explains that a rich uncle came to town and helped him land a job at twenty-five dollars a week on the old New York *American*. He describes his lack of distinction as a reporter: "They gave me story to cover in Queens and Brooklyn and I would get lost and spend hours trying to find my way back. I couldn't learn to steal a picture from a desk when a family refused to be photographed and I invariably got emotionally involved and tried to kill the whole story to save the subject."³ He balked at a girl's suggestion that he goes into advertising, but he prepared, at behest of an editor, a collection of short stories for the Robert McBride Company. When this work was rejected, he returned to California by working his way as a deckhand on a ship that went through the Panama Canal. Finally, he settled down as a caretaker at an isolated Lake Tahoe resort to work on his fiction. After writing three novels that have

never been published, Steinbeck finally placed *Cup of Gold* – a pseudo-epic about a “lost generation” version of a famous Caribbean pirate – with the company that had rejected his short stories. He made little from this breakthrough; however, for the novel appeared just two months before the stock market crash of 1929; and by 1936, when the novel was reissued, it had sold only 1,533 copies.⁴

With the publication of a second novel, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), Steinbeck turned to the California settings that he was to employ almost exclusively for the next two decades. This novel had actually been started after the third to be published, *To a God Unknown* (1933) a work that had the undergone many revisions and that he was still reworking at the time he seemed to have established a connection with a publisher. This publishing house, and even its successor, was forced out of business, however, before the copies of *The Pastures of Heaven* were even bound. Yet, despite the book’s troubles, it earned the author four hundred dollars – more than either *Cup of Gold* or *To a God Unknown*, which failed to repay even the publishers’ two-hundred-and-fifty dollar advances.

Between the publication of his first two novels, Steinbeck had three other experiences that greatly shaped his life. He was married for the first time, in 1930, to Carol Henning of San Jose, who joined him while he was working in the Los Angeles area. That same year he met Ed Ricketts, who remained Steinbeck’s closest friend and advisor until Ricketts’s accidental death in 1948.



Steinbeck and Ricketts Miniature Busts in Bronze

In “About Ed Ricketts”, Steinbeck fosters the legend that they met in a dentist’s waiting room; but intimates insist that they actually met at a mutual friend’s party. Also in 1931, through a woman who wrote Western stories under the name of John Breck, Steinbeck was introduced to the firm of McIntosh and Otis, the New York literary agents who represented him for the rest of his life.

The dozen years of Steinbeck first marriage saw him develop from the obscure author of some puzzling and little noted novels to one of the most acclaimed writers in the world. The first years of marriage, however, suggested little of this future promise. The newlyweds moved to the quiet, respectable Methodist seaside encampment of Pacific Grove, the particular butt of Steinbeck’s ridicule from *To a God Unknown* to *Sweet Thursday*. His family provided him with a small house and twenty-five dollars a month – enough to exist during the Depression. The young Steinbecks moved briefly back to the Los Angeles area in 1932, but they returned to the Monterey Peninsula before the publication of *To a God Unknown* in 1933. When Steinbeck’s mother died after a long and painful illness in 1934, her son’s only consolations during this dark period was the acceptance of the first two parts of *The Red Pony* and two other stories by the *North American Review*, and the selection of the stories, “The Murder”, for the O. Henry Prize *Stories* volume in 1934.

The precipitous rise to fame, which made a writer who once hoped for an audience of about twenty thousand into the idol of millions, began with the publication of *Tortilla Flat*, a pseudo-Arthurian glorification of Monterey’s Mexican-American *paisanos* that Steinbeck looked upon as a relaxation for his taxing labors on *To a God Unknown*. Several publishers rejected the episodic tale as too frivolous for trying times; but Steinbeck’s fortunes changed when an astute Chicago bookman, Ben Abramson, insisted that Pascal Covici read *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*.

When Covici became enthusiastic and called Steinbeck’s agents to ask about other works, he was sent the *Tortilla Flat* manuscript, which was published under the Covici, Friede imprint. Steinbeck had found the editor-publisher who was to sponsor all of his works until Covici’s death in 1964.

Although socially conscious critics attacked *Tortilla Flat* as a sentimental defense of vagabondage, readers liked it, as they did James Thurber’s *My Life and Hard Times* and

Kaufman and Hart's play *You Can't Take It With You*; for all three folklike comedies consoled impoverished audiences with the welcome message that money wasn't everything. Steinbeck's novel won the annual Gold Medal of the Commonwealth Club of California for the best work by a native of state, but this award made him uneasy about the effect of publicity. He hoped it might be his last such prize, and he did not attend the award dinner. He also saw his way of life changing when he was paid three thousand dollars – the most money he had ever earned in a lump sum – for the film rights. He made a long-planned trip to Mexico, but he found that he could not work there and returned to a secluded new home in Los Gatos, in the hills of a wine country just outside his wife's hometown of San Jose.

He had little time to brood, however, for 1936-the year that his father died – was one of his busiest. Covici, Friede published *In Dubious Battle*, a novel about a novel about a strike that Steinbeck predicted would become the center of critical controversy. (Party-line Communists did protest his treatment of the labor organizers.) He had to rewrite his first play-novelette, *Of Mice and Men*, when a dog chewed up the original draft.

The seed for *The Grapes of Wrath* was sown when Steinbeck visited the migrant workers' camps in order to prepare a series of articles, "The Harvest Gypsies", for the *San Francisco News*. (These were later collected and published with additional material as *Their Blood Is Strong*.)

Steinbeck's reputation soared in 1937 when *Of Mice and Men* was accorded the best reception received by any of his works to that time, despite his own misgivings about the success of the work as a realization of his intentions. Its selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club meant an immediate sale of ten thousand copies, and Steinbeck found himself designated one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Year. He returned in triumph to a New York that he had left felling rejected just a decade earlier. After touring England, Ireland, Sweden, and Russia during his first trip to Europe, he returned in the autumn to Bucks County, Pennsylvania - which was just then becoming a fashionable retreat – to work on the script of the play version of *Of Mice and Men* with famous play-doctor George S. Kaufman at Kaufman's home. The play, which had already been performed directly from the novel by the Theatre Union in San Francisco from May 21 to July 31, 1937, opened to laudatory reviews on Broadway during the Thanksgiving season; but Steinbeck never saw the New York production, since he was traveling back to California for another look at the migrant camps. Although the

play lost the Pulitzer Prize to Thornton Wilder's experimental *Our Town*, it won the New York Drama Critics' Circle's award on the first ballot and enjoyed a long run before being made into a then quite daring film starring Burgess Meredith, Betty Field, and Lon Chaney, Jr. Yet Steinbeck's name had not acquired box-office magic; for a vulgar dramatization of *Tortilla Flat* by Jack Kirkland, who was looking for a successor to his long-running dramatization of Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, flopped within a week.

Steinbeck rejected an offer from Life to do a series about migrant workers because he did not wish to profit from their misfortunes; but he was unable to avoid making a fortune and acquiring international celebrity from his angry and compassionate novel about them. Steinbeck's success came, however, too late to starve off disaster for his publisher; for, in August, 1938, while *The Long Valley* – the collection of short stories that Steinbeck had long wanted to see published – was in proof and while the author was struggling to create his greatest success, creditors took over the house of Covici, Friede. Steinbeck and his editor did not part company, however, for the novelist choose to follow his discoverer when became an executive editor for the **Viking Press**. *The Long Valley* was the first of many Steinbeck novels and nonfictional works to bear the imprint of the firm with which he remained associated until his death.

Viking discovered in 1939 what an asset it had acquired; for, had it not been for the sensational reception a few years earlier of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* would have been the most remarkable debut of a novel between the two world wars. Although critics and public generally missed the subtle point of a book that was most often compared to *Uncle's Tom Cabin* as social propaganda, they bought printing after printing; indeed, publishers' Weekly listed the novel as the top seller of 1939 and as the eighth best one of 1940. Frank Luther Mott estimates in **Golden Multitudes** that over half a million copies were sold of the original edition. Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for the best novel of the year, along with an American Booksellers' Award; and less than a month after the first announcement of the novel on December 31, 1938, Steinbeck was received into the prestigious National Institute of Arts and Letters – along with William Faulkner – on January 18, 1939.

Steinbeck also became a confidant of the mighty. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt praised *The Grapes of Wrath* in her column "My Day", and President Roosevelt invited the novelist to

make his first call at the White House. Steinbeck reminisced years later in an article for **Collier's** about proposing a plan for harassing the Nazis with counterfeit money that delighted the President, but shocked Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau. Steinbeck still sought, however, to avoid the spotlight. Late in 1939 he went with Ed Ricketts on an expedition to the coast north of San Francisco to collect specimens of marine invertebrates. Between March 11 and April 20, 1940, he and his wife accompanied Ricketts on a similar but more elaborate expedition on the purse seiner *Western Flyer* to the Gulf of California, a trip described in the "Log" from *The Sea of Cortez*, which also contains many reflections on the nonteleological thinking that attracted both Steinbeck and Ricketts.



Sea of Cortez

Steinbeck had also become interested in the kind of documentary films made by Pare Lorentz (who filmed *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River* for government reconstruction agencies during the Depression). Deeply moved by Herbert Kline's film about the invasion of Poland (*Lights Out in Europe*), Steinbeck rejected an offer to work on a film for Twentieth-Century-Fox to travel with Kline to Mexico during the spring and summer of 1940 in order to become acquainted with the nation's remote mountain villages and to prepare the script for *The Forgotten Village*, a feature-length, pseudo-documentary that subsequently won a first prize at the **World Film Festival** in Brussels in 1947.⁵

Although Steinbeck intermittently lived in California during the 1940s, he was never again so exclusively associated with his native state as during the strife-torn thirties. This decade saw rapidly mature as an artist until he produced *The Grapes of Wrath*, the masterpiece that was to be hailed in both book and film versions as one of the most outstanding examples of the significant trends in the novel and in films during the first four decades of this century. Though the novel and film found him friends and fans throughout the world, they alienated him from many of rural Californians among whom he had grown up and who now responded to his

treachery with now-forgotten fictional and nonfictional efforts to refute the story that he told.⁶ Like Thomas Wolfe, Steinbeck learned that when a writer becomes the dispassionate observer and reporter of his home country, he “can’t go home again”.

Notes:

¹ *America and Americans* (New York, 1966), p.59. Steinbeck provides even more details on his great-grandfather's mission in "*Letters to Alicia*", *Newsday*, February 12, 1966, p. 3-W. One with the great-grandfather vision would not have been deterred by the Jews' have been dispersed from Palestine nearly two millennia earlier.

² See Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York, 1963), pp. 1-3, for a fuller account of Steinbeck's family, compiled with the assistance of members of the family.

³ *The Making a New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, February 1, 1953, VI, iii, 27. The article is a part of a special supplement exploring in words and pictures the complex image of New York City.

⁴ Lewis Gannet, "Preface", *Cup of Gold* (New York), p.v.

⁵ See Herbert Kline, "On John Steinbeck", *Steinbeck Quarterly*, IV (summer, 1971), 80-88, for the director reminiscences of his association with John Steinbeck and a story of the making and distribution of the film.

⁶ See Warren French, ed., *A Companion to "The Grapes of Wrath"* (New York, 1963), pp. 133-43, for an account of these "answers" to the novel.

Chapter II

STEINBECK A NATURALIST AND REGIONALIST

“Man unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments.”

(John Steinbeck)

Steinbeck is a model example of the modern American nostalgia for the primitive, the counter-reaction to the triumphant urbanization of American culture which took place in the first half of twentieth century. He stands at the opposite extreme from the Horatio Alger myth, for he admires everything that is not a material success: the have-nots, the misfits, the racial minorities unjustly deprived of their civil and economic rights, the simple, the poor, and the oppressed. His rural heroes, illiterate and sometimes weak-minded, are nevertheless essentially noble; far from realistically described, they are actually poetized rustics in the traditional romantic manner. It is true that Steinbeck is a naturalist, and that his novels are based on first-hand research, carefully documented, and essentially faithful to the facts. But everything is transformed: the creative process simplifies character, idealizes qualities, and casts over the whole a web of significance so that what might have been mere documentary reporting becomes a form of art comparable to the Greek tragedy of the Homeric epic.

Steinbeck is a regionalist as well as a naturalist; his region is the Salinas Valley in central California and the nearby Monterey coast, a rather exotic enclave in American civilization populated with Mexican farm workers, Italian fishermen, and assorted artists, bohemians, and eccentrics.



Salinas Valley

In addition to Steinbeck both Henry Miller and Robinson Jeffers have made literary use of this region. But neither Jeffers nor Miller has found in the Monterey country the wealth of native material that Steinbeck extracts from it. Whether he describes the country faithfully is, in the end, a question of secondary importance; his Monterey and Salinas countries areas many imaginary realms as the Yoknapatawpha Country of Faulkner. Here live his poetic Mexicans, his sentimental cannery workers, his eccentric and colorful fishermen; here his rural tragedies unfold in the atmosphere of the naturalistic novel mingled with that of the Greek pastoral. Like Willa Cather, Steinbeck is fascinated with foreign elements in the American population; and like most regionalists he believes the elemental life of the country infinitely superior to that of the city. When his characters are established securely on the land they are hard-working and good-hearted, if somewhat inclined to drink and argumentation. When their agricultural activities are dislocated – when the Joads are driven from Oklahoma, or when a seductive woman intrudes her way into the agrarian dream of Lennie and George in *Of Mice and Men* – tragedy and Bitterness result.

Steinbeck, like many naturalists, presents scenes of great cruelty and passion in his novels. *The Grapes of Wrath*, upon its appearance in 1939, excited a torrent of puritanical indignation almost equal to that which greeted Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. Steinbeck is not interested in mere frankness for shock effect, however. His characters use profanity because they know no other way of speaking; it is a sort of tic or mannerism to them. This is the reason profanity is so frequent in the speech of illiterate people; foul language is as conventional in some groups as polite formulae are in cultured society. Actually Steinbeck's characters are seldom deliberately cruel, and are more likely to be gentle. When they commit crimes it is usually through accident (*The Grapes of Wrath*) or out of sheer stupidity (*Of Mice and Men*), and they generally regret such acts as soon as they realize their full implications.

In politics Steinbeck during the Thirties was a consistent independent liberal. Some of his novels are mere allegory or folklore, devoid of any social content (*The Wayward Bus*, *The Pearl*, *Of Mice and Men*). *The Grapes of Wrath* is a compassionate toward the plight of migrant Oakies, but offers little as a solution but the organized philanthropy of the New Deal. *In Dubious Battle* is a strike story which ostensibly glorifies the left-wing labor movement, but violence is tacitly condemned, and official Communism found the “line” of the novel unacceptable. During the Second World War Steinbeck wrote outright war propaganda in *Bombs Away* (1942) and something very close to it in *The Moon Is Down* (1942). Steinbeck is generally sympathetic to the proletariat and to the rural laborer. He has not, however, adhered consistently to the platform of any one party or movement.

Steinbeck is more conscious of style than most naturalist; there is a certain poetic quality to his prose. Several of his novels represent attempts to create a synthetic folklore, utilizing the traditional stylistic devices of the folk-tale. He makes strong use of rhythm and repetition: Lennie’s theme of “George ... are we gonna have rabbits, George?” is woven into *Of Mice and Men* like the recurring motif of a sonata. His descriptions of nature are terse but highly charged with imagery. Sometimes he feels the same tenderness toward the sea or the hills that he does toward his rural folk-heroes. Occasionally, especially in *Of Mice and Men*, he consciously creates the classic tragedy; the catastrophe of George and Lennie proceeds inevitably out of their flaws in the same manner as the catastrophe of Agamemnon. The figures are drawn on a smaller scale, it is true, but it is precisely Steinbeck’s point that humble and illiterate people may have their tragedies too.

Steinbeck’s fiction technique is “dramatic” in another sense: it is based largely on dialogue, connected together with brief descriptive passages, and is almost barren of formal exposition. The situation of the characters and their previous history are explained through conversation rather than through explicit exposition by the author, just as they must be on stage. For this reason Steinbeck’s novels and stories are easily dramatized; several of them have been converted into successful plays and films. At least two of them, *The Moon Is Down* and *Burning Bright*, were deliberately written as “dramatic stories” which can be converted into dramas with a minimum of adaptation; they consist entirely of dialogue interspersed with brief passages of action which are really nothing but stage directions. The others among his novels which are most dramatic in style are *Of Mice and Men*, *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes*

of *Wrath*, and *The Pearl*. The groups of his works are not easily into dramas includes especially the semi-humorous Monterey stories: *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *Sweet Thursday*. Here there is much exposition, usually ironic or whimsical, written from the abstract point of public opinion or rumor in the Monterey community.

Steinbeck's work is diverse not only in style but in quality. His styles may be roughly classified under four head:

1. naturalistic tragedies: *Of Mice and Men*

The Grapes of Wrath

In Dubious Battle, etc.

2. the whimsical Monterey idylls: *Tortilla Flat*, etc.

3.pastorals: *The Red Pony* and similar lyrical-sentimental works, etc.

4.miscellaneous adventure stories laid outside the Salinas- Monterey region:

The Moon Is Down, *Bombs Away*, etc.

Of these, groups (1) and (3) are superior in quality, although *In Dubious Battle* is not usually considered the literary equal of the others. The stories in group (2) are considered well done but of lesser importance; Steinbeck is here writing for a popular audience and seeking frankly to amuse. Group (4) is consistently inferior; the two works cited are little more than propaganda, and Steinbeck's lack of intimate personal contact with his material produces a quality of abstraction that destroys their effectiveness. A fifth of minor works might be cited: the symbolic parables, including *Burning Bright* (1950) and *The Pearl* (1948). Steinbeck, the artist of primitive himself; he is a competent professional writer who is always conscious of formal literary technique and of literary history, and who can write in a diversity of styles to suit his material.

John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the specific story of the Joad family in order to illustrate the hardship and oppression suffered by migrant laborers during the Great Depression. It is an explicitly political tract that champions collectivist action by the lower classes over expressions of individualist self-interest and chastises corporate and banking elites for shortsighted policies meant to maximize profit even while forcing farmers into destitution and even starvation.

The novel begins with the description of the conditions in Dust Bowl Oklahoma that ruined the crops and instigated massive foreclosures on farmland. No specific characters

emerge initially, a technique that Steinbeck will return to several times in the book, juxtaposing descriptions of events in a larger social context with those more specific to the Joad family.

Tom Joad, a man not yet thirty, approaches a diner dressed in spotless, somewhat formal clothing. He hitches a ride with a truck driver at the diner, who presses Tom for information until Tom finally reveals that he was just released from McAlester prison, where he served four years for murdering a man during a fight. Steinbeck follows this with an interlude describing a turtle crossing the road, which he uses as a metaphor for the struggles of the working class.

On his travels home, Tom meets his former preacher, Jim Casy, a talkative man gripped by doubts over religious teachings and the presence of sin. He gave up the ministry after realizing that he found little wrong with the sexual liaisons he had with women in his congregation. Casy espouses the view that what is holy in human nature comes not from a distant god, but from the people themselves. Steinbeck contrasts Tom's return with the arrival of bank representatives to evict the tenant farmers and the tractors to farm the land. He raises the possibility of a working class insurrection, but cannot find an effective target for collective action.

When Tom and Casy reach the Joad's house, it has been deserted. Muley Graves, a local elderly man who may not be sane, tells them that the Joads have been evicted, and now stay with Uncle John. Muley's own family has left to find work in California, but Muley decided to stay himself. That night, since they are trespassing on the property now owned by the bank, the three are forced to hide from the police who might arrest them.

Steinbeck follows this with a description of the tactics that car dealers use to exploit impoverished customers. They find that they can make a greater profit by selling damaged jalopies than by selling dependable new cars.

Tom Joad finds the rest of his family staying with Uncle John, a morose man prone to depression after the death of his wife several years before. His mother is a strong, sturdy woman who is the moral center of family life. His brother, Noah, may have been brain damaged during childbirth, while his sister, Rose of Sharon (called Rosasharn by the family) is recently married and pregnant. Her husband, Connie Rivers, has dreams of studying radios. Tom's younger brother, Al, is only sixteen and has the concerns befitting that age. This is followed by a more general description of the sale of items by impoverished families who intend to leave Oklahoma for California, as the Joads expect to do.

The Joads plan to go to California based on flyers they found advertising work in the fields there. These flyers, as Steinbeck will soon reveal, are fraudulent advertisements meant to draw more workers than necessary and drive down wages. Jim Casy asks to accompany the Joads to California so that he can work with people in the fields rather than preach at them. Before the family leaves, Grampa Joad refuses to go, but the family gives him medicine that knocks him unconscious and takes him with them. The subsequent chapters describes the vacant houses that remain after the Oklahoma farmers leave for work elsewhere, as well as the conditions on Route 66, the highway that stretches from Oklahoma to Bakersfield, California.

Almost immediately into the journey, the Joad family loses two members. The first victim is the family dog, which is run over during their first stop. The second is Grampa Joad, who dies of a stroke. The Wilson family helps the Joads when Grampa dies, and the two families decide to make the journey to California together. Steinbeck follows this with a larger statement about the growing of a collective consciousness among the working class, who shift their perceptions from “I” to “we”.

The Wilson's car soon breaks down, and Tom and Casy consider separating from the rest of the family temporarily to fix the car, but Ma Joad refuses to let the family break apart even temporarily. Tom and Al do find the necessary part to fix the car at a junkyard, where the one-eyed man who watches over the junkyard complains about his boss and threatens to murder him. Before the Joads set out on their journey again, they find a man returning from California who tells them that there is no work there, and the promises of work in the flyers are a fraud.

The Joads and Wilsons reach California, where they are immediately subjected to intimidation by police officers who derisively call them and other migrant laborers “Okies”. At the first camp where they stay, Granma becomes quite ill, but receives some comfort from proselytizing Jehovahites who merely annoy Ma Joad. The police force them out of the camp, but the Wilsons choose the possibility of arrest instead, since Sairy Wilson is too sick to continue. The next time that the police stop the Joads on their travels, Ma Joad forces them to let them pass without inspection. She does this to hide from the police the fact that Granma has died.

Steinbeck follows this with a description of the history of California, which he frames as one marked by oppression and slavery. However, he predicts an imminent revolution, for the

people there have been deprived to such a great degree that they must take what they need in order to survive.

At the next camp where the Joads stay on their search for work, they learn about Weedpatch, a government camp where the residents do not face harassment by police officers and have access to amenities including baths and toilets. When more police officers attempt to start a fight with Tom and several other migrant workers, Tom trips him and Casy knocks him unconscious. To prevent Tom from taking the blame, for he would be sent back to jail for violating his parole, Casy accepts responsibility for the crime and is taken away to jail. The rest of the family begins to break apart as well. Uncle John leaves to get drunk, Noah decides to leave society altogether and live alone in the woodlands, and Connie abandons his pregnant wife. Before they must move on, Tom does retrieve Uncle John, who is still consumed with guilt over his wife's death. They head north toward the government camp.

At the government camp, the Joads are shocked to find how well the other residents treat them and how efficiently this society in which the camp leaders are elected by the residents functions. Tom even finds work the next day, but the contractor, Mr. Thomas, warns him that there will be trouble at the dance at Weedpatch that weekend. Since the police can only enter the camp if there is trouble, they intend to plant intruders there who will instigate violence.

The Joads settle into a comfortable existence at the government camp, and during the dance that Saturday, Tom and several other residents defuse the situation, preventing the police from taking control of the camp. Nevertheless, after a month in Weedpatch none of the Joads have found steady work and realize that they must continue on their journey. They arrive at Hooper Ranch, where the entire family picks peaches. The wages they receive are higher than normal, for they are breaking a strike. Tom finds out that the leader of the labor force that is organizing the strike is Jim Casy. After his time in prison, Casy realized that he must fight for collective action by the working class against the wealthy ruling class. Tom, Casy and the other strike leaders get into a fight with strike breakers, and one of them murders Casy with a pick handle. Tom struggles with the man and wrests away the weapon. He, in turn, kills the man who murdered Casy, and barely escapes capture by the police.

Although Tom wishes to leave the family to spare them from taking responsibility for him, the Joads nevertheless decide to leave Hooper Ranch for a location where Tom can be

safe. They reach cotton fields up north, where Tom hides in the woods while the family stays in a boxcar. Although the family attempts to keep Tom's identity and location a secret, young Ruthie Winfield reveals it during a fight with another child. When Ma tells Tom about this, he decides to leave the family and go off alone, determined to fight for the cause for which Casy died, and vows to return to his family one day.

The raining season arrived almost immediately after Tom left the family, causing massive flooding. The Joads are caught in a dangerous situation: they cannot escape the flooding because Rose of Sharon suddenly goes into labor. While other families evacuate the camp near the rapidly rising creek, the Joads remain and attempt to stop the flood waters. Without the aid of others, the Joads are unsuccessful, and they must seek refuge on the top of their car. Rose of Sharon delivers a stillborn child that Uncle John sends in a box down the creek. The family eventually reaches higher ground and finds a barn for shelter. Inside the barn is a starving man and his young son. Steinbeck ends the novel with Rose of Sharon, barely recovered from the delivery, breastfeeding the dying man to nurse him back to health.

When John Ernst Steinbeck was given the Nobel Prize in 1962, the award was not universally acclaimed by critics, many of whom felt either that it had come too late or that his work was not of the same quality as that of Lewis, O'Neill, Faulkner, or Hemingway, previous American recipients. Nobody said much about Pearl Buck. He was clearly past the height of his powers, although the Swedish Committee of the Academy professed to admire *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), a 311 page allegory, set on Long Island, unaccustomed territory for Steinbeck. In 1962, perhaps feeling that he had lost close touch with his nation, Steinbeck undertook a cross-country trip in a camper with his poodle Charley. *Travels With Charley* (1962) sold well but remains "a somewhat bloodless travelogue" for the sixties. John Steinbeck died at the end of 1968 of heart disease in Manhattan. At his best he had written with cinematic clarity, and the late show reruns of *The Grapes of Wrath* with Henry Fonda and *East of Eden* with James Dean with an occasional rereading of *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and Men* may remain America's best memory of him.

Notes:

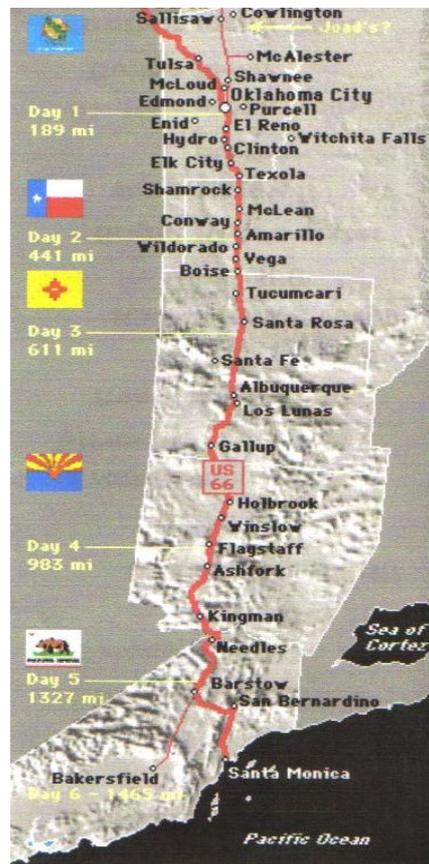
¹ Reported in the **New York Times**, October 26, 1962, p. 12

Chapter III

THE PARADISE...LOST

Thus they changed their social life – changed as in the whole universe only man can change. They were not farm men any more, but migrant men. And the thought, the planning, the long staring silence that had gone out to the fields, went now to the roads, to the distance, to the West. That man whose mind had been bound with acres lived with narrow concrete miles. And his thought and his worry were not any more with rainfall, with wind and dust, with the thrust of the crops.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*¹



Migrant's way to California

Versatile almost to a fault, John Steinbeck has written of many different things. His earliest novel was a swashbuckling romance based upon the career of an English buccaneer. Later

writings have ranged over such diverse themes as marine biology, the air force, the Nazi occupation of Norway, Mexican peasant life, and village politics on Long Island. Steinbeck the man has wandered no less widely, having lived different places and visited even more.

Yet Steinbeck's most memorable work has been focused on the section of California where he was born and spent his earliest years. The Steinbeck country, strictly defined, is Salinas Valley, a long narrow depression lying to the south of Monterey Bay. Bordering the valley on the east are the golden foothills of the Galibian Mountains; on the west tower the grim and forbidding Santa Lucias standing like ramparts between the valley and the Pacific Ocean. Streams tumbling down the mountainsides from the Salinas River, an erratic stream that may swell to torrential size, trapping cows and pigs, toppling barns and houses, tearing away acres of good farm land or shrink until it goes completely underground. "It was not a fine river at all, but it was the only one we had and so we boasted about it – how dangerous it was in a wet winter and how dry it was in a dry summer. You can boast about anything if it's all you have. Maybe the less you have, the more you are required to boast." ²

On the floor of the valley the topsoil lay deep and fertile, providing lush nourishment for the spring flowers that grew in wild profusion and for grains and vegetables planted by the farmers. But this fecundity did not extend to the uplands; over the foothills the soil was precariously thin, and the higher slopes were completely eroded.

Each major phase of California history had touched the Salinas valley. The earliest inhabitants had been Indians of a primitive culture who neither hunted nor tilled the soil but lived on grubs, grasshoppers, and shell fish. Then had come Spaniards, who accumulated huge ranches and raised cattle for hides and tallow. Finally the Americans pushed in, settling first in the fertile valley and then along the slopes of the foothills. After the Civil War, California's masterful capitalists had thrust the Southern Pacific Railroad through the area and then promoted settlement with exuberant advertising. After reading this, says Steinbeck, "anyone who did not want to settle to settle in the Salinas Valley was crazy."³ Improved transportation and modern miracles of refrigeration ultimately encouraged the inhabitants to specialize in growing lettuce and other perishables for the national market. Steinbeck's own forbears had participated in these historic events. His maternal grandfather, the patriarchal Samuel Hamilton, has emigrated from Ireland and homestead in the foothills east of King City. Unable to grow enough on his ample but barren acres, Hamilton had a precarious living drilling wells

and blacksmithing while he sired nine children. One of his daughters, the spunky Olive Hamilton, began teaching in country schools at the age of eighteen and eventually married John Steinbeck, Sr. who had come from Florida and built a flour mill in King City. The couple subsequently moved to Salinas, where the husband continued in the milling business and served for many years as treasurer of Monterey County. It was into the moderately prosperous household that John Steinbeck, the future novelist, was born on February 27, 1902.

During his boyhood Steinbeck developed a love for nature and sensitivity to the world of birds and animals. "The most tremendous morning in the world," he recalled was one "when my pony had a colt."⁴ His schoolteacher mother instilled in him an enthusiasm for books and reading. At the Salinas high school, he participated in track and baseball and was elected president of his senior class. He spent vacations laboring as a hired hand on nearby ranches, and after graduation he worked for a year as an assistant chemist in a sugar beet factory.

Over a period of five years Steinbeck intermittently attended Stanford University, earning less than half of credits he needed for a degree. When he was not in attendance, he held a variety of jobs – clerking in a haberdashery store, working as a farm hand, and doing road work – all the while adding to the fund of observation and experience from which he drew later literary material.

He spent (1925) several months in New York, in a premature attempt to launch a literary career. Supporting himself as a reporter and laborer, he wrote short stories but was unable to get them published. He wrote short stories but was unable to get them published. He worked his way back to California as a deckhand on a ship passing through the Panama Canal. Still grinding out manuscript, he served for a time as caretaker of an estate on Lake Tahoe and as an attendant in a fish hatchery in the Sierras. In 1929, his first novel *Cup of gold* appeared without creating any excitement either among the critics or with the general public.

From the standpoint of the historian, Steinbeck's greatest value lies in his feeling for the great transition in twentieth century agriculture. He remembers with nostalgia the comfortable agricultural society of his boyhood and youth; he understands the commercial forces that transformed agriculture after World War I; he shares the lot of the marginal farmers who lost their independence and became migrants during the Great Depression.

Steinbeck was not old enough to remember the great westward movement that had brought Americans into California. Yet the state was still so young that there were strong oral

traditions of its heroic age. Weaving the saga of his own mother's family into the complex tapestry of *East of Eden*, Steinbeck wrote: "I must depend on hearsay, on old photographs, on stories told, and on memories which are hazy and mixed with fable in trying to tell about the Hamiltons."⁵

In the career of Samuel Hamilton, an Irish, Protestant immigrant, both the opportunities and limitations of federal land policy were illustrated. When he arrived in the Salinas Valley, he recorded claims for 480 acres. He added to this, until in the end he acquired title to a total of 1760 acres.⁶ If the land had been any good, such lavish governmental bounty would have guaranteed a fortune, but all the rich bottom land was gone when Hamilton arrived, and his acreage was in harsh and dry hill country.

Yet the more fortunate settlers enjoyed nature's bounty in lavish measure. Describing a district near the mouth of Salinas Valley, Steinbeck wrote: "Rich vegetable land has been the result of the draining, land so black with wealth that the lettuce and cauliflowers grow to giants."⁷ In the better years evening worked together for good. "It was a deluge of a winter in the Salinas Valley, wet and wonderful ...The feed was deep in January, and in February the hills were fat with grass and the coats of the cattle looked tight and sleek. In March the soft rains continued. ...Then warmth flooded the valley and the earth burst into bloom – yellow and blue and gold."⁸

At its best the West was much more munificent than the East, but climatic conditions were so different as to require adaptation. Adam Trask, looking over his parched acres during a hot summer, "felt the panic the Eastern man always does at first in California." In Connecticut two weeks without rain is a dry spell and four is a drought. "But in California it does not ordinarily rain at all between the end of May and the first of November. The Eastern man, though he has been told, feels the earth is seek in the rainless months."⁹

Once the first hardships were overcome, the westerners enjoyed an idyllic existence- or so it seemed in romantic retrospect. The ranch described in "The Red Pony" provided a secure environment for the boy Jody. The human relationships were extraordinarily fine: a warm and tender mother, a strong father whose sternness was tempered by affection, a companionable ranch hand, and rich in practical knowledge. The lessons taught at the district school were only a part of the boy's education. He did the chores appropriate to his age. When he was ten, he was feeling the wood box and feeding chickens; a few months later he was driving a hay rake,

helping with the balling, and milking a cow. What might have been the exploitation of child labor under different circumstances was the purposeful activity of an excited boy earning his own pony. Through vivid experience he learned not only the practical business of farming but was initiated into the mysteries of birth and death. Shield from nothing, he witnessed the whole process by which his pony came into existence – the rough coupling of stallion and mare, the course of pregnancy, and the crude and bloody operation necessary to deliver the foal.¹⁰

But agricultural America also valued its more formal agencies of education. “In the country the repository of art and science was the school, and the school teacher shielded and carried the torch of learning and beauty. The schoolhouse was the meeting place for music, for debate. The polls were set in the schoolhouse for elections. Social life, whatever it was the crowning of a May queen, the eulogy to a dead president, or an all-night dance could be held nowhere else.”¹¹

Rural democracy had its own checks and balances. “Every town has its aristocrats, its family above reproach. Emalin and Amy Hawkins are our aristocrats, maiden ladies, kind people. Their father was a congressman.”¹² The respect spinsters provided “the safe thing” – the place where a kid could get reassurance. “They’re proud, but they believe in things we hope are true.”¹³

Attractive though they were, the simple values of the older society were forever threatened by the accelerating tempo of change. Bemoaning the impact of the automobile, the village postmaster said: “They’ll change the face of the countryside. They get their clatter into everythingWe even feel it here. Man used to come for his mails once a week. Now he comes every day, sometimes twice a day. He just can’t wait for his damn catalogue. Running around. Always running around.”¹⁴

In the *Leader of the People* the grandfather persisted in long-winded stories about crossing the plains despite the obvious boredom of a younger generation that had heard all this before. Trying once more to explain himself, the old man said: “We carried life out here and set it down the way those ants carry eggs. And I was the leader. The westering was as big as God, and the slow steps that made the movement piled up and piled up until the continent was crossed.”¹⁵ To his grandson eager to do similar deeds he said sadly: “No place to go, Jody. Every place is taken. But that’s not the worst – no, not the worst. Westering has died out of the people. Westering isn’t a hunger any more. It’s all done. Your father is right. It is finished.”¹⁶

But the western movement was not really finished after all. During the 1930's, thousand of shabby automobiles and trucks crowded the roads leading to California. For some the old dreams were revived. Ma Joad liked to think how nice it was going to be." Never cold. An' fruit ever' place; an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees."¹⁷ Yet the woman's hopes were nourished more by her own nature than by the reality of her situation. The movement of which she was a part was more retreat than conquest. The highway west was "the path of a people in flight, refuges from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness to the land and steal what little richness is there."¹⁸



People in their way to California

It was this last pathetic westering that provided Steinbeck with his most memorable literary material. All his earlier years helped to prepare him for writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. In his own Salinas Valley he had seen the increasing specialization of agriculture and the growing reliance upon migrant labor. During his student days he had worked side by side with these poorly-paid laborers. When the agricultural workers revolted in a series of violent strikes, Steinbeck gathered the material for his grim strike novel *In Dubious Battle*. Instead of exhausting his interest in the problem, this piece of writing apparently intensified it. During the fall of 1936, Steinbeck lived in migrant camps and work in the fields near Salinas and Bakersfield. In articles published in **The Nation** and **The San Francisco News** he reported upon the appalling poverty and dangerous discontent of the workers.

“My material drawer is chock full.” Steinbeck wrote to his literary agent in October, 1936. Yet his experience was far more than a gathering of notes. To an extraordinary degree he was able to share the life and hardship of the workers. “I have to write this sitting in a ditch,” he wrote to a friend. “I’m out working – may go south to pick a little cotton. Migrants are going south now and I’ll probably go along.”¹⁹ Even in the final stage of work on *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck felt compelled to live his desk to aid the migrants. “I must go over into the interior valleys. There are five thousand families starving to death over there, not just hungry, but actually starving....I’ll do what I can ...Funny how mean and how little books become in the face of such tragedies.”²⁰

Why had these suffering people come to California? In 1937, Steinbeck sought an answer. Having bought a car in Detroit, he drove to Oklahoma, where he saw for himself the combination of economic forces and natural disasters that were uprooting the farm population. He joined a group of migrants and shared their hardships on the long trek to the Pacific coast. The power and passion of *The Grapes of Wrath* is delivered from this intense experience.

A weird league of furious bedeviled Midwestern farmers during the 1930’s. First, there was drought, parching the corn and cotton and drying out the top soil; then came the great winds, churning up the dust and blowing it across the countryside, in storms so violent that the men and women huddled in the houses and wore goggles over their eyes and handkerchiefs over their noses when they went out. “Houses were shut tight, and cloth wedged around doors

and windows, but the dust came in so thinly that it could not be seen in the air, and it settled like pollen on the chairs and tables, on the dishes.”²¹



The people walking through the dust

While calamities of nature were robbing the soil of its fertility, equally inexorable human forces were thrusting the farmers off land. There had always been a substantial number of tenant farmers sharecropping the land belonging to large individual owners. Now the number of tenants was rapidly increasing, and the new owners were corporations – banks and finance companies. The process was simple. The hard-pressed farmer had to borrow money; the bank or finance company assumed title to the land; and the one-time owner became a sharecropper. The loss in status and security was painful: “Grandpa took up land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money....The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised.”²²

But even the pittance that the sharecropper retained was not safe. “Well, the folks that owns the lan’ says, ‘We can’t afford to keep no tenants.’ An’ they says, ‘The share a tenant gets is jus’ the margin a profit we can’t afford to loose.’ An’ they says, ‘If we put all our lan’ in one piece we ca jus’ hardly make her pay. ’So they tractored all the tenants off the lan’.”²³ As the agent for the corporate owner explained: “The tenant system won’t work any more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop. We have to do it . We don’t like to do it.”²⁴

To the anguished tenants, the giant tractors were bloodless automatons destroying their familiar world. The driver seemed without a will of his own. “The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was a part

of the monster, a robot in the seat.”²⁵ He would drive across the country, cutting through a dozen farmers and straight across the country, cutting through a dozen farms and straight back. The human element seemed to have been removed from the whole process.

“Behind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades – not plowing but surgery, pushing the cut earth to the right where the second row of disks cut it and pushed it to the left; slicing blades shining, polished by cut earth. And pulled behind the disks, the harrows combing with iron teeth so that the little clods broke up and the earth lay smooth. Behind the harrows, the long seeders – twelve curved iron penes erected in foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion.”²⁶



The wrinkled soil

The evicted tenants belonged to a class that was usually quick to resort to violence, but in the present circumstances they did not know whom to fight. When the tractor driver, stopping for lunch, removed his goggles, he was recognized as Joe Davis’s boy, one of themselves, who had taken the job to feed his wife and children. When the tenants protested that his tractor was depriving fifteen or twenty families of their livelihood, the driver replied: “Can’t think of that. Got to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day, and it comes every day. Times are changing, mister, don’t you know? Can’t make a living on the land unless you’ve got two, five, ten thousand acres and a tractor. Crop land isn’t for little guys like us any more...”²⁷ He confided that his employers gave him a two dollars bonus for every “accident” in which he plowed so near to a stubborn tenant’s house that it fell down.²⁸

To shoot the driver would do not good. “They’ll just hang you, but long before you’re hung there’ll be another guy on the tractor, and he’ll bump the house down.” It will be equally futile to shoot the bank president and the board directors. “Fellow was telling me the bank gets orders from the East. The orders were, ‘Make the land show profit or we’ll close you up.’” The

driver's final comment was fatalistic: "Maybe there's nobody to shoot. Maybe the thing isn't men at all. Maybe, like you said, the property's doing it." But the tenant – perhaps Steinbeck arguing with himself – was not satisfied with the answer: "There's some way to stop this. It's not like lightning or earthquakes. We've got a bad thing made by men, and by God that's something we can change."²⁹

Deprived of their means of livelihood, a few of the former sharecroppers took laboring jobs on the new giant farms. But there was no work for most of them, and the only spark of hope came in news of the opportunities for migrant labors in California. Reading about the Promised Land, Ma Joad scarcely knew what to think. "I seen the han'bills fellas pass out, an' how much work they is an' high wages an' all; an' I seen in the paper how they want folks to come an' pick grapes an' oranges an' peaches. That'd be nice work, Tom, pikin' peaches. Even if they wouldn't let you eat none, you could maybe snatch a little ratty one sometimes. An' it'd be nice under the trees, workin' in the shade." But she was too shrewd a woman to be taken in completely. "I'm scared of stuff so nice. I ain't got faith. I'm scared somepin ain't so nice about it."³⁰

Whatever their misgivings, thousands of families could see no other way of escape. They invested in second-hand cars and trailers, and set out on the great adventure. The heartbreaks began even before they left home. Often the only available buyer for their possessions was a junk dealer, who would purchase as sharp metal the farmer's still serviceable tools. "When everything that could be sold was sold, stoves and bedsteads, chairs and tables, little corner cupboards, tubs and tanks, still there were piles of possessions; and the woman sat among them, turning them over and looking off beyond and back, pictures, square glasses, and here's a vase."³¹

They loaded what they could into their ancient automobiles and trucks, then burned the rest – the books and knickknacks that linked the family to the past. "Suddenly they were nervous. Got to get out quick now. Can't wait. We can't wait. And they piled up the goods in the yards and set fire on them. They stood and watched them burning, and then frantically they loaded up the cars and drove in the dust. The dust hung in the air for a long time after the loaded cars had passed."³²

The California Trail of the new westering was Highway 66 – "the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield

– over the red lands and the grey lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, into the rich California valleys.”³³

Making their faltering way over this 1400 mile obstacle course were the jalopies of the migrants. Many were recently purchased from unscrupulous used car dealers, who had silenced moaning transmissions with sawdust and patched over dangerous wounds in the tires. Hour after hour these unreliable vehicles rolled slowly over the roads. ”In the day ancient leaky radiators sent up columns of steam, loose connecting rods hammered and pounded. And the men driving the trucks and the overloaded cars listened apprehensively. How far between towns? It is a terror between towns. If something breaks – well, if something breaks we camp right here while Jim walks to town and gets a part and walks back and – how much food we got?”³⁴

Filling stations and garages dealt warily with the wanderers. When the latter had cash, the operators took advantage of their necessities to sell them second-hand tires and used parts at bloated prices. When they ran out of money, the businessmen steeled themselves against their importunities. “Why,” one filling station owner complained, “the folks that stops here begs gasoline an’ they trades for gasoline. I could show you in my back room the stuff they’ll trade for gas an’ oil: beds an’ baby buggies an’ pots an’ pans. One family traded a doll their kid had for a gallon. An’ what’m I gonna do with the stuff, open a junk shop?”³⁵

Yet the migrants did not always receive harsh treatment. Occasional acts of kindness – often brusquely performed – aided their passage. The operators of a –roadside restaurant, restaurant, touched by hungry faces, might sell a 15-cent loaf of a bread for a dime, or two 5-cent candy bars for a penny. And rough truck drivers, watching the scene, might double their tips as a way of making their own contribution to this shamefaced philanthropy.³⁶

Eager to reach their destination some families might drive twenty-four hours a day, but most of the migrants camped by the roadside each night. During the day they traveled as separate families but each evening they became part of community. “And because they were very lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared together their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. “One family might choose a campsite near a spring; a second family attracted

both by the spring and the prospect of company, might stop; a third family, impressed by a site so favored, might join them. “And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there.”³⁷ Not forgetting their manners, each newcoming family gravely asked permission to stop from those already on the campsite.

The chosen places fulfilled certain requirements. Most important was access to water – “a river bank, a stream, a spring, or even a faucet unguarded.” The campers also needed enough flat land to pitch their tents and a little brush or wood to build fires. A nearby dump was an advantage, since it could provide useful equipment – “stove tops, a curved fender to shelter the fire, and cans to cook in and eat from.”³⁸

Having quickly to their gypsy life, the families knew what had to be done each night, and each night member did his part without orders. The children gathered wood and carried water; the men pitched the tents and unloaded the beds; the women cooked and served the food. Chores performed and families fed, the itinerants fraternized with their neighbors. In nostalgic mood they swapped stories about the places they had come from; in anxious curiosity they compared conjectures about the mysterious country that lay ahead.

Sometimes a man would produce a guitar and start singing. Slowly the other campers would gather around and join softly in the old familiar ballads. “And now the group was welded to one thing, one unit, so that in the dark the eyes of the people were inward, and their minds played in other times, and their sadness was like rest, like sleep ... The children drowsed with the music and went into the tents to sleep, and the singing came into their dreams.”³⁹

In the morning the families would pack up and take to the road again. Each traveled at its own pace so that one night’s fellow-campers were not identical with the next. Yet for all their transience, the migrant colonies were true communities. The travelers knew how they were expected to behave. “The families learned what rights must be observed – the right of privacy in the tent; the right to keep the past black hidden in the heart; the right to talk and to listen; the right to refuse help or to accept, to offer help or to decline it; the right of son to court and daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the right of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights.”⁴⁰

Behavior that violated these rights would not be tolerated. No one must intrude upon privacy or be noisy while the camp slept. No one must rape or steal or murder. “And as the worlds moved westward, rules became laws, although no one told the families.” It was

unlawful to foul the drinking water. It was unlawful to eat good rich food near a hungry man, unless he was asked to share. “And with the laws, the punishments – and there were only two – a quick and murderous fight or ostracism; and ostracism was the worst.”⁴¹

The western movement of the 1930s with its ancient cars and trucks rattling over paved roads seemed far different than the earlier migration in covered wagons drawn across dusty trails by horses and oxen. Yet there were common features. In both, mountain and desert threatened the wayfarers with delay and hardship. In both, the various age groups followed their traditional patterns of behavior. Children lived each day in wide-eyed excitement; young couples made love and planned their future; middle-aged people struggled and worried; old folks grieved and died.

The death of the elders brought as much perplexity as sorrow. To migrating families, stretching every dollar to complete the long journey, even the simplest funeral rites might be too expensive. Sometimes under cover of night male survivors would hustle a body into a hastily-dug grave and take to the road again. Knowing full well the illegality of their action, the Joads explained their conduct on a piece of paper that they placed in Grandpa’s grave: “This here is William James Joad, dyed of a stroke, old old man. His fokes bured him becaws they got no money to pay for funerals. Nobody kilt him. Jus a stroke an he dyed.”⁴²

The California toward which the migrants were making their painful way was far different from the frontier to which Steinbeck’s grandfather had come. The first generations of Americans had often been lawless men, squatting on land that did not belong to them and guarding their stolen property with guns. But they had been real farmers with “stomach-tearing lust” for rich acres and for plows, windmills, and seeds. Their grandchildren were not really farmers at all, in Steinbeck’s definition. They were little shopkeepers of crops. “No matter how clever, how loving a man might be with earth growing things, he could not survive if he were not also a good shopkeeper. And as time went on, the businessmen had the farms, and the farms grew larger, but there were fewer of them.”⁴³

Farming had become an industry, “and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know it.” They began to use Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipino laborers – paying them so little that they were almost slaves. Meanwhile the crops were changing. Instead of grain, more and more fruit and vegetables were grown. Many of these were “stoop crops.” “A man may stand to use a scythe, a plow, a pitchfork; but he must crawl like a bug between the

rows of lettuce, he must bend his back and pull his long bag between the cotton rows, he must go on his knees like a penitent across a cauliflower patch.”⁴⁴

As a giant properties grew, some became so large “that one man could not even conceive of them any more, so large that it took batteries of bookkeepers to keep track of interest and gain and loss: chemists to test the soil, to replenish; straw bosses to see that the stooping men were moving along the rows as swiftly as the material of their bodies could stand. ”Profits increased when the owner operated a store. Then he could pay the men, and afterwards sell them food and take the money back. Or even simpler, he could sell the food on credit and settle up when the wages were due. ”A man might work and feed himself; and when he work was done, he might find that he owned money to the company.”⁴⁵

The owners could not depend exclusively on Mexicans and Orientals to meet their need for seasonal laborers. Some of the foreigners became disillusioned with harsh treatment and went home; some became dangerously defiant and were killed or driven out. Increasingly the owners sought to recruit native hands in the Middle West. Through agents they distributed thousands of handbills offering employment in picking oranges and other crops. The advertising found eager readers in the drought-stricken land. “And then the dispossessed were drawn west – from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and a hundred thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand.”⁴⁶



“Okies”



“Okies”



"Okies"



"Okies"

Many more laborers were drawn to California than were needed. Steinbeck believed that this was a matter of cynical calculation on the part of owners. Because of the surplus of workers and their desperate poverty, the employers could cut wages ruthlessly. As a disillusioned migrant explained to Tom Joad: "Know what they was payin', las' job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar an' ya can't stay on the place. Got to burn gasoline getting' there...That's why them han'bills with what ya save payin' fifteen cents an hour for fiel' work."⁴⁷



Seven generation back

Even at these starvation wages the work was short-lived. For fifty weeks a year nine men might suffice to tend a mammoth peach orchard. But for two weeks of harvest, the owners would need three thousand hands. "Got to have 'em or them peaches'll rot. So what do they do? They need three thousan', an' they get six thousan'. They get them men for what they wanta pay. If ya don't wanta take what they pay, goddamn it, they's a thousan' men waitin' for your job. So ya pick, an' then she's done."⁴⁸

And when one such job was done, all the jobs in that part of the country were likely to be done too. Because of the heavy specialization all the crops of a region were likely to ripen at the same time. As soon as the owners had completed the harvest, they forced the migrants to move on. They feared that the jobless strangers might resort to thievery or become involved in drunken brawls. They disliked the ugliness of their shabby camps. Most of all, they abhorred the prospect of higher taxes through additions to the local relief rolls. And so, willing or unwilling, the laborers would have to move on to scramble for whatever jobs might be available in some other section.

In dealing with the migrants the owners could count on the help of public authorities. When migrants lingered too long, local boards of health would condemn their camps as health hazards. Sheriffs and their deputies would arrest as “reds” or “agitators” laborers who complained too loudly about their treatment. If harsher were required, private vigilantes would raid the camps at night, beating up the migrant leaders and burning down their shanties – all in connivance with the law enforcement officers.

By inducing so many families to come to California, the owners had created a monster that they obviously feared. And the fear of the owners was shared by most other Californians. Storekeepers hated the migrants because they had nothing to spend; bankers hated them because they were unable to either save or borrow; laborers hated them as rivals in the job market. Although the strangers came from many other states besides Oklahoma, they were lumped together under the invidious label “Okies”. In Steinbeck’s description, the Okies were unschooled, poor and violent; but they were also proud and independent. “We ain’t foreign. Seven generations back Americans, and beyond that Irish, Scotch, English, German. One of our folks was in the Revolution, an’ they was lots of our folks in the Civil War – both sides.”⁴⁹

The Okies avoided the payment of rent by huddling in shanty settlements that had sprung up the outskirts of the California towns – each bearing the bitter generic name of Hooverville. “The man put up his own tent as near to water as he could get it; or if he had no tent, he went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper. And when the rains came the house melted and washed away.”⁵⁰

Arriving in California after their long trip over the road, the Joads found shelter in one of these ugly villages. “There was no order in the camp; little gray tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random. “The first shanty the Joads saw was of bizarre construction: one wall

was made of corrugated iron strips; a second of moldy carpeting; a third of tarred paper; a fourth of gunny sacking. The entrance was cluttered with equipment. "A five-gallon kerosene can served for a stove. It was laid on its side, with a section of rusty stovepipe thrust in one end. A wash boiler rested on its side against the wall; and a collection of boxes lay out about, boxes to sit on, to eat on. A Model-T Ford sedan and a two-wheel trailer were parked beside the shack, and about the camp there hung a slovenly despair."⁵¹

In regions where there was little work, the migrants might be close to the starvation. Cooking the Joad family's first California meal over an outdoor fire, Ma Joad found herself under hungry scrutiny. "The children, fifteen of them, stood silently and watched. And when the smell of the cooking stew came to their noses, their noses crinkled slightly....The children were embarrassed to be there, but did not go."⁵² By quizzing them, she discovered that the children had had no breakfast and that their regular evening fare consisted of fried dough – nothing but flour and water. Although the Joads had scarcely enough stew for themselves, they felt a sense of guilt in eating it. They huddled miserably in the tent consuming their portions, while outside the hungry children scraped the pot with little sticks on Ma Joad's invitation. "A mound of children smothered the pot from sight. They did not talk, did not fight or argue; but there was quiet intentness in all of them, a wooden fierceness....There was the sound of scraping at the kettle, and then the mound of children broke and the children walked away and left the scraped kettle on the ground."⁵³

In this Hooverville, the Joads received a painful initiation into the harsh realities of the day. Soon after their arrival, a contractor and a sheriff's deputy made a joint visit to the camp. The contractor sought recruits for jobs in another country; the deputy arrested a migrant who asked too persistently how many men would be employed and how much they would be paid. By tripping up the deputy and kicking him in the neck, the men of the Joad party helped the culprit to escape, but such victories were Pyrrhic. The Joads had to take to the road again, while local vigilantes took their revenge by burning down the shacks.

After this experience, the Joads welcomed the security offered by a government camp – one of a few maintained as New Deal experiments. Behind a light fence they found a clean and orderly compound that contrasted sharply with the ramshackle Hoovervilles. "Tom walked down the street between the rows of tents....He saw that the rows were straight and that there was no light about the tents. The ground of the street had been swept and sprinkled."⁵⁴



Little gray tents in the camp

A citadel of respectability was the “sanitary unit” – a building low, rough, and unpainted on the outside, but admirably functional within. ”The toilets lined one side of the large room, and each toilet had its compartment with a door of it. The porcelain was gleaming white. Hand basins lined another wall, while on the third wall were four shower compartments.”⁵⁵ Investigating these mysteries, the Joad children ran away in panic, when the water roared through the toilet bowls.

Accustomed to arbitrary treatment from local law enforcement officers, the migrants exulted in the sanctuary provided by the government camps. “You mean to say they ain’t no cops?” Tom Joad asked incredulously, and the watchman replied, “No sir. No cop can come here without a warrant.” The campers governed themselves. An elected central committee made the laws and enforced them. “Well, s’pose a fella is jus’ mean, or drunk an’ quarrelsome. What then?” For the first such offense, the watchman explained the central committee warned the troublemaker. ”And the second time they really warn him. The third time they kick him out of the camp.”⁵⁶

So seriously did the central committee take its responsibilities that the official camp manager was left with little to do other than to offer genial welcome to the newcomers. “The people here worked me out of a job,” he happily explained. “They keep the camp clean, they keep order, they do everything. I never saw such people. They’re making clothes in the meeting hall. And they’re making toys. Never saw such people.”⁵⁷

In this environment Ma Joad felt a return of the self-respect that she had lost in her first encounter with California officialdom. “These folks is our folks – is our folks. An’ that manager, he come an’ set an’ drank coffee, an’ he says, ‘Mrs. Joad’ that – an’ ‘How you getting’ on, Mrs. Joad?’”...Why, I feel like people again.”⁵⁸ In appropriate response, she took decisive steps to get the family clean. She ordered changes of clothing and washed the dirty overalls and dresses; she commanded that the children be scrubbed until they were red and shiny; she took a much needed shower bath herself.

On Saturday night the campers danced on an outdoor platform that they had built and lighted with electric fixtures salvaged from the city dump. Men were garbed in freshly-washed overalls and girls in print dresses, stretched and clean, their hair braided and ribboned. They swung around vigorously in country-style dances to the accompaniment of fiddlers, guitars, and harmonicas. “And the girls were damp and flushed, and they danced with open mouths and serious reverent faces, and the boys flung back their long hair and pranced, pointed their toes, and clicked their heels. In and out the squares moved, crossing, backing, whirling, and the music shrilled.”⁵⁹

While most of the migrants relaxed, the camp leaders were patrolling the fence to keep out uninvited strangers and watching the dancers closely to remove any troublemakers. Thanks to a tip from a friendly farmer, the leaders knew that deputies were waiting outside, prepared to invade the camp on any plausible pretext. “If they can git a fight goin’, then can run in the cops an’ say we ain’t orderly. They tried it before – other places.”⁶⁰

The central committee’s counter measures saved the day, but the situation remained dangerous. Why did the big farmers and their henchmen seek to destroy the federal projects? The guard in a crude camp maintained by one of the big fruit companies suggested one reason. Disgusted by a migrant’s inquiry as to whether there was no water, the guard commented: “It’s them gov’ment camps....I bet that fella been in a gov’ment camp. We ain’t gonna have no peace till we wipe them camps out. They’ll be wantin’ clean sheets, first thing we know.”⁶¹ More serious perhaps was the issue recognized by one of the Okies: “They’re scairt we’ll organize, I guess. An’ maybe they’re right. This here camp is a organization. People there look out for themselves.”⁶²

All that government camps could do was to maintain a minimum of decency in living conditions. The migrants still had to find their own jobs, and there was not much demand for

labor in the Bakersfield area at the time the Joads were there. In his one short period of employment Tom Joad received sharp instruction in the power structure of California agriculture. The small farmer for whom Tom worked was a good man wanting to treat his workers fairly, but he could not hold against orders from above. Ashamed and humiliated, he explained why he had to cut wages from 30 cents to 25 cents an hour. The Farmers' Association to which he belonged had had a meeting the night before. "Now, do you know who runs the Farmers' Association? I'll tell you. The Bank of West. That bank owns most of this valley, and it's got paper on everything it don't own. So last night the from the bank told me, he said, 'you're paying thirty cents an hour. You'd better cut it down to twenty-five.' "The farmer had protested that he had good men who were worth what he was paying them, but the banker cut him off." "It isn't that, 'he says. 'The wage is twenty-five now. If you pay thirty, it'll only cause unrest. And by the way, 'he says 'you going to need the usual amount for a crop loan next year?' "63

Small farmers could not afford the luxury of defying the banks. As victims of progress, they themselves were in a highly precarious position. The problems of Oklahoma, crops were failing; in California, they were succeeding all too well. "All California quickens with produce, and the fruit grows heavy, and the limbs bend gradually under the fruit so that little crutches must be placed under them to support the weight." To the bounty of nature had been added the ingenuity of man. "Behind the fruitfulness are men of understanding and knowledge and skill, men who experiment with seed, endlessly developing the techniques for great crops of plants whose roots will resist the million enemies of the earth: the molds, the insects, the rusts, the blights."64 Science had developed better wheat, better apples, better grapes, better walnuts. But the market mechanism did not keep pace with the leap inb production. "Men who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow."65

The depression's supreme irony came with the destruction of surplus crops. Oranges for which there was no market were squirted with kerosene; potatoes were dumped in rivers; pigs were slaughtered and buried. "There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success."66

In this over-productive economy the big producers stood a better chance of survival than the small. “The little farmers watched debt creep up on them like the tide. They sprayed the trees and sold no crop, they pruned and grafted and could not pick the crop.” As the small operators went under, the banks and the great owners took over. They could still make a profit because they owned the canneries. “And four pears peeled and cut in half, cooked and canned, still cost fifteen cents. And the canned pears do not spoil. They will last for years.”⁶⁷

However pleasant the Joads found the government camp, they could not stay long. They needed money desperately and had to resume their journeying. In the orchards of Tulare Country, they found what at first seemed to be a tolerable opportunity. The whole family, even twelve-year-old Ruthie and the ten-year-old Winfield, picked and packed peaches at five cents a box. The first night the Joads dined on hamburg, potatoes, bread and coffee. Humble though the menu was, it was better food than they had eaten for many days.

Yet even in this rare moment of full employment, the migrants’ life was still grim. The Joads were housed in a company shack – one of “fifty little square, flat-roofed boxes, each with a door and a window, and the whole group in a square.”⁶⁸ The interior was filthy. “The floor was splashed with grease. In the one room stood a rusty tin stove rested on four bricks and its rusty stovepipe went up through the roof. The room smelled of sweat and grese.”⁶⁹ Unless they wanted to make a long trip to town, the migrants had to buy their provisions at the company store, a large shed of corrugated iron. Here Ma Joad purchased pale hamburg, full of fat and gristle, at five cents a pound more than in town, and other goods at similarly inflated prices.

Worst of all, the Joads discovered that they were being used as strike-breakers. Suspicious of the police motorcade that escorted them into camp and the armed guards patrolling the premises, Tom Joad slipped under the fence and learned the real situation. As the strike leader – the Reverend Jim Casy who had accompanied the Joads from Oklahoma – explained, “We come to work there. They says it’s gonna be fi’ cents. They was a hell of a lot of us. We got there an’ they says they’re payin’ two an’ a half cents. A fella can’t even eat on that an’ if he got kids – So we says won’t take it. So they druv us off. An’ all the cops in the worl’ come down on us.”⁷⁰

The laborer trouble erupted into savage violence that night. During an attack upon the pickets, a deputy killed Casy and was himself killed by Tom Joad. Having broken the strike,

the owners promptly cut the rate to two and a half cents a box. This time there was no resistance. The migrants scrambled shamelessly for the work. As Uncle John reported, there was “a whole slew a new pickers so goddam hungry they’d pick for a loaf of bread. Go for a peach, an’ somebody’d get in first. Gonna get the whole crop picked right off. Fellas runnin’ to a new tree. I seen fights – one fella claims it’s his tree, ‘nother fella wants to pick off’n it. Brang these here folks from as far’s El Centro. Hungrier’n hell.”⁷¹ The rate was too low to hold any but the most desperate men, yet the owners cynically calculated that the peaches would all be picked before the laborers quit again.

With Tom Joad a fugitive, the rest of family resumed the search for jobs. The last agricultural task of the season was picking cotton. It was hard work, but it reminded the Joads of home. They found dry living quarters in one half of a converted freight car. “It’s nice,” Ma Joad said, “It’s almost nicer than anything we had ‘cept the gov’ment camp.”⁷²

I would like to describe in a few words the characters of the novel before I’ll had finished this chapter:

Tom Joad, the central character of the novel, he is a recently released inmate imprisoned for murder who returns home to find that his family has lost their farm and is moving west to California. Tom is a plainspoken, forthright and direct man, yet he still retains some of his violent tendencies.

Ma Joad, the mother of Noah, Tom, Rose of Sharon, Ruthie and Winfield, Ma Joad is a woman accustomed to hardship and deprivation. She is a forceful woman who is determined to keep her family together at nearly all costs, yet remains kind toward all, even sparing what little the family has for those even less fortunate.

Pa Joad, although Pa Joad is the head of the Joad household, he is not a forceful presence. Without the ability to provide for his family, he recedes into the background, playing little prominent role in deciding the fate of his family.

Uncle John, a morose man prone to depression and alcoholism, Uncle John believes himself to be the cause of the family's misfortune. He blames himself for the death of his wife several years ago, and has carried the guilt of that event with him.

Rose of Sharon, Tom Joad's younger sister, recently married to Connie Rivers and pregnant with his child, Rose of Sharon is the one adult who retains a sense of optimism in the

future. She dreams of a middle-class life with her husband and child, but becomes paranoid and disillusioned once her husband abandons her when they reach California.

Connie Rivers, the shiftless husband of Rose of Sharon, Connie dreams of taking correspondence courses that will provide him with job opportunities and the possibility of a better life. When he reaches California and does not find work, he immediately becomes disillusioned and abandons his pregnant wife.

Noah Joad, Tom's older brother, he suffers from mental disabilities that likely occurred during childbirth. He leaves the family to remain an outsider from society, supporting himself by catching fish at the nearby river.

Al Joad, Tom's younger brother, at sixteen years old he is concerned with cars and girls, and remains combative and truculent toward the rest of the family. Out of the Joad family, he has the most knowledge of cars, and fears that the rest of the family will blame him if anything goes wrong. He dreams of becoming a mechanic, and becomes engaged to Aggie Wainwright by the end of the novel.

Ruthie Joad, one of the two small children in the Joad family, it is Ruthie who reveals that Tom is responsible for the murder at Hooper Ranch, forcing him to leave his family to escape capture by the police.

Winfield Joad, the other small child in the Joad family, Winfield becomes severely ill during the course of the novel from deprivation, but survives his illness.

Grampa Joad, an energetic, feisty old man, Grampa refuses to leave Oklahoma with the rest of his family, but is forcibly taken on the journey after he is drugged by the other family members. Soon afterward, unable to bear leaving the area where he had long lived, Grampa dies of a stroke.

Granma Joad, she does not survive much longer than her husband. She becomes severely ill on the journey to California, and dies not long after they reach the state.

Reverend Jim Casy, a fallen preacher who too often succumbed to temptation, Casy left the ministry when he realized that he did not believe in absolute ideas of sin. He espouses the idea that all that is holy comes from collective society, a belief that he places in practical context when, after time in jail, he becomes involved with labor activists. Casy is a martyr for his beliefs, murdered in a confrontation with police.

Muley Graves, he is a crazy elderly man who reveals to Tom Joad the fate of his family. Having lost his home and farmland, his wife and children left Oklahoma for California, but Muley decided to remain, where he attempts to elude the police for his constant trespassing and live outside of society.

Sairy Wilson, she and her family aid the Joads when Grampa Joad has a stroke, and decides to continue with the Joads on the way to California, for the two families can help each other on the way. She falls ill at the first camp where the two families stay, and remains there with the rest of her family, facing the possibility of arrest for trespassing.

The Mayor, he is a half-crazed old migrant worker driven 'Ebull-simple' from continued torture by the California police.

Floyd Knowles, he befriends Al Joad and tells the Joad family about work opportunities and about the government camp at Weedpatch.

Timothy and Wilkie Wallace, these two brothers are Weedpatch camp residents who take Tom to find work when they arrive at the government camp.

Mr. Thomas, the contractor who hires Tom and the Wallaces, he warns the men about the intruders who will interrupt the dance at the government camp.

Jessie Bullitt, she is the head of the Ladies Committee at Weedpatch who gives Ma Joad a tour of the facilities.

Ella Summers, she is the assistant to Jessie Bullitt and formerly the head of the Ladies Committee who frequently bickers with Jessie over insignificant details.

Jim Rawley, he is the manager of the camp at Weedpatch who treats the Joads with an unexpected respect.

Lisbeth Sandry, she is a fundamentalist zealot who complains about the alleged sin that takes place at the government camp, including dancing, and frightens Rose of Sharon with her admonitions about sin.

Ezra Huston, he is the elected head of the Central Committee at Weedpatch who advises Tom and the other men on how to deal with the situation at the Saturday dance.

Willie Eaton, he is the head of the Weedpatch entertainment committee who defuses the problem of the intruders and the police during the dance.

Aggie Wainwright, she is the young woman to whom Al Joad becomes engaged.

The final pages of Steinbeck's novel, the rains descended, and a flood drove the Joads out of their box car heaven. What became of them? They presumably survived, because they – or at least the indomitable Ma Joad – had the toughness to endure. Yet, even greater hardships certainly lay ahead. The great rain was the prelude to winter, and for three months there would be no employment of any kind. Residency rules prevented the granting of local relief. Hungry men crowded the alleys behind stores "to beg for bread, to beg for rotting vegetables, to steal when they could."⁷³ Women sick with pneumonia gave birth in damp barns, and old people curled up in corners and died. Doctors were too busy to answer the frantic calls of the migrants. "The sheriffs in new deputies and ordered new rifles, and the comfortable people in tight houses felt pity at first, and then distaste, and finally hatred for the migrant people."⁷⁴

Would the end be social revolution? Steinbeck did not think it impossible; in the eyes of the hungry, "he said, "there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."⁷⁵

Notes:

¹ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*(New York: Viking Press, 1939), 267-68

² John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*(New York: Viking Press,1952), 4.

³ Ibid., 134.

⁴ Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*(New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 22.

⁵ John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*(New York: Viking Press,1952), 8.

⁶ Steinbeck attributes his grandfather's land acquisitions to homestead claims taken out in the name of himself, his wife, and nine children. This would not have been legal under the Homestead Act itself, but title to this much acreage might have been possible under other land laws with the aid of subterfuge then common.

⁷ John Steinbeck, "Johnny Bear", *The Long Valley*(New York: Viking Press, 1939), 145.

⁸ John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*(New York: Viking Press,1952), 310.

⁹ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰ "The Red Pony", *The Long Valley*, 203-79.

¹¹ John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*(New York: Viking Press,1952),147.

¹² "Johnny Bear", *The Long Valley* , 154.

¹³ Ibid., 163.

¹⁴ John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*(New York: Viking Press,1952),370

¹⁵ "The Leader of People", *The Long Valley*, 302.

¹⁶ Ibid., 303.

¹⁷ *The Grapes of Wrath*, 124.

¹⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹ Lisca, op. cit., 145.

²⁰ Ibid., 146.

²¹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, 5.

²² Ibid., 45.

²³ Ibid., 64.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Ibid., 48.

²⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

²⁷ Ibid., 50.

²⁸ Ibid., 51.

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 122-123.

³¹ Ibid., 119.

³² Ibid., 121.

³³ Ibid., 160.

³⁴ Ibid., 161.

³⁵ Ibid., 172.

³⁶ Ibid., 216-220.

³⁷ Ibid., 264.

³⁸ Ibid., 267.

³⁹ Ibid., 272.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 265.

⁴¹ Ibid., 266.

⁴² Ibid., 194.

⁴³ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 316-317.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 335.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 317-318.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 320.

⁵¹ Ibid., 328-329.

⁵² Ibid., 344.

⁵³ Ibid., 352.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 393.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 409.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 415.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 420.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 467-468.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 453.

⁶¹ Ibid., 515-516.

⁶² Ibid., 406.

⁶³ Ibid., 402.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 473.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 476.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 477.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 476.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 503.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 504.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 522.

⁷¹ Ibid., 544.

⁷² Ibid., 558.

⁷³ Ibid., 591.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 592.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 477.

Chapter IV

THE WESTERN JOURNEY TO CALIFORNIA

. . .The light was sifting rapidly over the land. And the movement of the family stopped. They stood about, reluctant to make the first active move to go. They were afraid, now that the time had come – afraid in the same way Grampa was afraid. They saw the shed take shape against the light, and they saw the lanterns pale until they no longer cast their circles of yellow light. The stars went out, few by few, toward the west.

(John Steinbeck)

Since his first dip into local labor problems in *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck has become increasingly concerned with the social aspects of his California setting, which have provided the material for his latest novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (April 1939). The articles Steinbeck wrote on the migratory laborers for the San Francisco News in 1936 lead directly to this new book; these articles were reprinted in a pamphlet two years later by the Simon J. Lubin Society of San Francisco, and a 1938 epilogue was added. This pamphlet, *Their Blood is Strong*, reveals how close - in sympathy and as an actual observer – Steinbeck is to his subject-matter. He has thoroughly explored the problems of the people he writes of, he understands these people, and his heart is with them. Besides the experience he had with them in California, he drove west from Oklahoma with some of them in 1937 and saw for himself the hardships that beset them on their western journey.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck takes one Oklahoma family and follows its fortunes on this westward trek and after arrival in California. Once again he goes outside his own valley, this time definitely into the great San Joaquin Valley, especially the torrid lower parts of it. The Joad family comes to Kern and Tulare Countries. Steinbeck is more specific about place references than he has ever been before, which is to be expected in the most realistic and Zolaesquely photographic novel he has yet written.

Released from an Oklahoma state prison after serving four years for a manslaughter conviction, Tom Joad makes his way back to his family's farm in Oklahoma. He meets Jim Casy, a former preacher who has given up his calling out of a belief that all life is holy—even the parts that are typically thought to be sinful—and that sacredness consists simply in endeavoring to be an equal among the people. Jim accompanies Tom to his home, only to find it—and all the surrounding farms—deserted. Muley Graves, an old neighbor, wanders by and tells the men that everyone has been “tractored” off the land. Most families, he says, including his own, have headed to California to look for work. The next morning, Tom and Jim set out for Tom's Uncle John's, where Muley assures them they will find the Joad clan. Upon arrival, Tom finds Ma and Pa Joad packing up the family's few possessions. Having seen handbills advertising fruit-picking jobs in California, they envision the trip to California as their only hope of getting their lives back on track.

The journey to California in a rickety used truck is long and arduous. Grampa Joad, a feisty old man who complains bitterly that he does not want to leave his land, dies on the road shortly after the family's departure. Dilapidated cars and trucks, loaded down with scrappy possessions, clog Highway 66: it seems the entire country is in flight to the Promised Land of California. The Joads meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple plagued with car trouble, and invite them to travel with the family. Sairy Wilson is sick and, near the California border, becomes unable to continue the journey. As the Joads near California, they hear ominous rumors of a depleted job market. One migrant tells Pa that 20,000 people show up for every 800 jobs and that his own children have starved to death. Although the Joads press on, their first days in California prove tragic, as Granma Joad dies. The remaining family members move from one squalid camp to the next, looking in vain for work, struggling to find food, and trying desperately to hold their family together. Noah, the oldest of the Joad children, soon abandons the family, as does Connie, a young dreamer who is married to Tom's pregnant sister, Rose of Sharon.

The Joads meet with much hostility in California. The camps are overcrowded and full of starving migrants, who are often nasty to each other. The locals are fearful and angry at the flood of newcomers, whom they derisively label “Okies.” Work is almost impossible to find or pays such a meager wage that a family's full day's work cannot buy a decent meal. Fearing an uprising, the large landowners do everything in their power to keep the migrants poor and

dependent. While staying in a ramshackle camp known as a “Hooverville,” Tom and several men get into a heated argument with a deputy sheriff over whether workers should organize into a union. When the argument turns violent, Jim Casy knocks the sheriff unconscious and is arrested. Police officers arrive and announce their intention to burn the Hooverville to the ground.

A government-run camp proves much more hospitable to the Joads, and the family soon finds many friends and a bit of work. However, one day, while working at a pipe-laying job, Tom learns that the police are planning to stage a riot in the camp, which will allow them to shut down the facilities. By alerting and organizing the men in the camp, Tom helps to defuse the danger. Still, as pleasant as life in the government camp is, the Joads cannot survive without steady work, and they have to move on. They find employment picking fruit, but soon learn that they are earning a decent wage only because they have been hired to break a workers’ strike. Tom runs into Jim Casy who, after being released from jail, has begun organizing workers; in the process, Casy has made many enemies among the landowners. When the police hunt him down and kill him in Tom’s presence, Tom retaliates and kills a police officer.

Tom goes into hiding, while the family moves into a boxcar on a cotton farm. One day, Ruthie, the youngest Joad daughter, reveals to a girl in the camp that her brother has killed two men and is hiding nearby. Fearing for his safety, Ma Joad finds Tom and sends him away. Tom heads off to fulfill Jim’s task of organizing the migrant workers. The end of the cotton season means the end of work, and word sweeps across the land that there are no jobs to be had for three months. Rains set in and flood the land. Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn child, and Ma, desperate to get her family to safety from the floods, leads them to a dry barn not far away. Here, they find a young boy kneeling over his father, who is slowly starving to death. He has not eaten for days, giving whatever food he had to his son. Realizing that Rose of Sharon is now producing milk, Ma sends the others outside, so that her daughter can nurse the dying man.

The Grapes of Wrath has a memorable beginning; the first chapter is at the top of Steinbeck’s work. The dust storm comes in slowly, muffling the air and driving the people to their houses: “In the morning the dust hung like fog, and the sun was red as ripe new blood. All day the dust sifted down from the sky, and the next day it sifted down. An even blanket

covered the earth. It settled on the corn, piled up on the tops of the fence posts, piled up on the wires; it settled on roofs, blanketed the weeds and trees..." The whole chapter has a symphonic effect, one of the most impressive in Steinbeck: it gets the story under way with a slow, steady rhythm that pervades the book and matches movement of the dispirited people. The pace stays too slow throughout the novel, so there is no real quickening into crescendo, but in these early parts the slow rhythm seems to promise a story of grandeur and epic movement.

Tom Joad, out on parole after serving four years for manslaughter, finds his home deserted when he gets there. He is told by a neighbor that the family has been driven off the land, and is going west. This neighbor has refused to leave. He is a little crazy, and continually has the dodge the men who come looking for him. He catches wild rabbits for his food.

Tom learns that his family is at an uncle's, and about to leave for California. Before hearing this, Tom has turned loose a turtle he had caught for his youngest brother. The turtle had later tried to escape, turning southwest, the direction he was going when Tom originally caught him. And upon finally being given its freedom, the patient animal again makes its slow way towards the southwest – it is the way life is moving.

When Tom gets to his family he finds them have a truck, and are on the verge of leaving. California has allured people since it was the fabled land of El Dorado. Now these people who have lost their homes are making a great migration there. These Oklahomans were property owners once, but they have become dispossessed: the financial structure of the country collapsed in the depression, and the soil itself failed, for man and earth alike were inheritors of a social system that knew no safeguard of planning. Mortgages were foreclosed during the depression, and property owners became tenant farmers, renting from the banks. After the dust storms, the banks decided to take over the land altogether; machine-farming could bring a slight margin of profit. The people were told to get out, and while they stood bewildered on the parched acres they saw tractors ridden through their doorways, crushing their houses. After the people were dispossessed, they were welcome nowhere; outside their own state they are called Okies, and it is a term of insult, a kind of successor to the phrase "poor white".



“Okies” – have no place to live...traveling...

California ranchers have drawn them westward with the bait of handbills promising work; thousand more men than are needed appear at the ranches where fruit or cotton picking is to be done, and the bosses can choose the men whose families are most desperate, men who will work for the cheapest wages. It is labor that used to be done by Mexicans and Filipinos who have left the fruit belt to white workers, “fruit tramps”, who are so beaten that they will tolerate even lower standards of living than foreign labor. When the short-lasting jobs are over, the workers are pushed on. They are not allowed to camp anywhere for long – they might get the right to vote, they might organize, they might get relief status, and then they couldn’t be

bargained with. Deputy sheriffs are continually prodding them on, looking for excuses to burn their wretched camps, to take all those who protest against such treatment and jail them as “reds”. The police themselves are tools of men and institutions higher in the social scale: Bruce Bliven has shown, in an article in *The New Republic* on California organization known as the Associated Farmers, how the wealthy landowners of the state have the railroads and the gas and electric companies on their side, how they all work together with the anti-union employers in the big cities. The whole emotional set-up of these vast landowners is antipodal to that of small farmers and dairymen in the Middle West and New England: Steinbeck, in his article for **The Nation**, “*Dubious Battle in California*”, named Herbert Hoover, William Randolph Hearst and A. J. Chandler of the reactionary Los Angeles Times as typical absentee landowners of feudal California.

Tom breaks parole to go with his family: Grampa and Granma, who have lived so long because they are “mean” (Grampa is Steinbeck’s best character so far in the Dickensian vein); Ma, who controls them all; Rosasharn (Rose of Sharon), who is married and has the dignity of being pregnant; the cocky younger brother, Al; the children – it is a full and living gallery. Pa is what might be called negative “Steinbeck men”: Joseph Wayne, and Mac of *In Dubious Battle*, previous “Steinbeck men”, have been successful midwives, as we have seen, but the elder Joad, who had been compelled by an emergency to deliver his own first-born, feels that he was inefficient and is being punished because Noah has never properly developed.

Grampa doesn’t survive the uprooting: he remains dazed, and before they get out of Oklahoma he dies in a roadside camp, with nothing to be buried in but the borrowed quilt he died on. The family has no money for burial, so they dig a grave themselves, and put grandpa’s body in it. They bury a bottle with him, containing some words Tom has scrawled on a flyleaf torn out of the Bible of another camper: “This here is William James Joad, dyed of a stroke, old old man. His fokes bured him becaws they got no money to pay for funerals. Nobody kilt him. Just a stroke and he dyed.” Because they are paupers with a man among them who will be hunted, they have to level off the grave and strew it with leaves. The whole scene – with the people in the glare of firelight, the men taking turns digging – has a homely and native essence. It belongs to the great midland prairie: yet the imaginative version producing it gives it also something of a legendary quality.

Things people say in *The Grapes of Wrath* sometimes have a flavor of staginess because Steinbeck was trying to reproduce speech exactly. This presents a problem: complete literalness in such matters doesn't necessarily simulate life in literature. American speech has been successfully fused into creative prose by perhaps only one writer, Ernst Hemingway. Hemingway doesn't attempt literalness, but adapts the rudiments of American speechrhythm to his personal sense of cadence. He is monotonous and repetitious, but deliberately so, and with telling effect. Although the speeches of his people have sufficient, relation to their source so they could be fitted to American lips, they are nevertheless not automatic reproduction – they have their own identity. These speeches are Hemingway's own distinctive instrument and at the same time a living suggestion of American utterance. The most successful speech-reproductions in *The Grapes of Wrath* are when Steinbeck approximates this condition in the chapter where he is trying to convey a general effect rather than literal individual conversations. These chapters occur at frequent intervals throughout the book; they are devoted to generalized accounts of moving body of people, of the topography of their journey, of they will find at the end of it. These sections are in some respects the best in the book; they never quite function so efficiently as they should because the contrapuntal chapters about the Joad family don't always have the continuous strength to carry them. If the central narrative were more forcefully concentrated, these choral chapters would be set off magnificently, given more meaning and volume. But although they don't realize their full accessory value, still they have a power in the way they catch the essential spirit of that sprawling westering movement. And they pick out its vocal overtones; American names are named, places are mentioned, automobiles and native foods are identified. And all this is not literal speech reproduction, but a swelling musical suggestion of it that gives a far, greater sense of "reality" than literal reporting. These chapters have an American resonance.

Steinbeck had great material for the central narrative part of his story: perhaps he was too much aware of this, took too much for granted. For although these sections of the book are handled smoothly, well written for the most part, and crowded with living people, the main story never quite comes to life in the way it should. This may be partly because the Joad group is too well-balanced;

Sometimes in this book Steinbeck's writing-power fails, and he slips into the literary. The blood-ripe sun that was so vivid in an early passage about the dust storms appears to poor

advantage in a later scene: “A large red drop of sun lingered on the horizon and then dripped over and was gone, and the sky was brilliant over the spot where it had gone, and a torn cloud, like a bloody rag, hung over the spot of its going.” This kind of writing, which is essentially “indoor” and literary in contrast to the authentic natural descriptions Steinbeck is capable of, can spoil important parts of the story.

As some of the excerpts already given from *The Grapes of Wrath* may indicate, there are plenty of fine descriptive bits all the way through – cold dawns in roadside camps, the memorable night pilgrimage over the sultry desert, glimpses of bright California valleys with their orchards and cotton fields, and the rainstorm and flood at the end of the book. The incidental parts of *The Grapes of Wrath* are the best, as in other Steinbeck books. The people met on the road, the life of the camps, the struggles of the Joad family: these fragments are unforgettably presented. Steinbeck understands the lives of these people, their thoughts, their behavior – and he understands their mythology, a queer mixture of half-digested Christianity and profaneness of utterance and elemental farmyard knowledges. All new experience is a basis for further legendry for them. Tom has been given a sense of social justice and he wants to work with people, organize them against the crushing system. He will fight the dubious battle to help lead his people out of the wilderness.

Whether Steinbeck will continue Tom’s story, or whether he will consider that all this is behind him and begin a new phase of his own career, only the future can tell. But this much is certain: up to this time he has gone farther than any other American writer towards being the poet of our dispossessed.

Chapter V

THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. Steinbeck consistently and woefully points to the fact that the migrants' great suffering is caused not by bad weather or mere misfortune but by their fellow human beings. Historical, social, and economic circumstances separate people into rich and poor, landowner and tenant, and the people in the dominant roles struggle viciously to preserve their positions. In his brief history of California in Chapter Nineteen, Steinbeck portrays the state as the product of land-hungry squatters who took the land from Mexicans and, by working it and making it produce, rendered it their own. Now, generations later, the California landowners see this historical example as a threat, since they believe that the influx of migrant farmers might cause history to repeat itself. In order to protect themselves from such danger, the landowners create a system in which the migrants are treated like animals, shuffled from one filthy roadside camp to the next, denied livable wages, and forced to turn against their brethren simply to survive. The novel draws a simple line through the population—one that divides the privileged from the poor—and identifies that division as the primary source of evil and suffering in the world

The Grapes of Wrath chronicles the story of two “families”: the Joads and the collective body of migrant workers. Although the Joads are joined by blood, the text argues that it is not their genetics but their loyalty and commitment to one another that establishes their true kinship. In the migrant lifestyle portrayed in the book, the biological family unit, lacking a home to define its boundaries, quickly becomes a thing of the past, as life on the road demands that new connections and new kinships be formed. The reader witnesses this phenomenon at work when the Joads meet the Wilsons. In a remarkably short time, the two groups merge into one, sharing one another's hardships and committing to one another's survival. This merging takes place among the migrant community in general as well: “twenty

families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream.” In the face of adversity, the livelihood of the migrants depends upon their union. As Tom eventually realizes, “his” people are all people.

The Joads stand as exemplary figures in their refusal to be broken by the circumstances that conspire against them. At every turn, Steinbeck seems intent on showing their dignity and honor; he emphasizes the importance of maintaining self-respect in order to survive spiritually. Nowhere is this more evident than at the end of the novel. The Joads have suffered incomparable losses: Noah, Connie, and Tom have left the family; Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn baby; the family possesses neither food nor promise of work. Yet it is at this moment (Chapter Thirty) that the family manages to rise above hardship to perform an act of unsurpassed kindness and generosity for the starving man, showing that the Joads have not lost their sense of the value of human life.

Steinbeck makes a clear connection in his novel between dignity and rage. As long as people maintain a sense of injustice—a sense of anger against those who seek to undercut their pride in themselves—they will never lose their dignity. This notion receives particular reinforcement in Steinbeck’s images of the festering grapes of wrath (Chapter Twenty-Five), and in the last of the short, expository chapters (Chapter Twenty-Nine), in which the worker women, watching their husbands and brothers and sons, know that these men will remain strong “as long as fear [can] turn to wrath.” The women’s certainty is based on their understanding that the men’s wrath bespeaks their healthy sense of self-respect.

According to Steinbeck, many of the evils that plague the Joad family and the migrants stem from selfishness. Simple self-interest motivates the landowners and businessmen to sustain a system that sinks thousands of families into poverty. In contrast to and in conflict with this policy of selfishness stands the migrants’ behavior toward one another. Aware that their livelihood and survival depend upon their devotion to the collective good, the migrants unite—sharing their dreams as well as their burdens—in order to survive. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck constantly emphasizes self-interest and altruism as equal and opposite powers, evenly matched in their conflict with each other. In Chapters Thirteen and Fifteen, for example, Steinbeck presents both greed and generosity as self-perpetuating, following cyclical dynamics. In Chapter Thirteen, we learn that corporate gas companies have preyed upon the gas station attendant that the Joads meet. The attendant, in turn, insults the Joads and hesitates to help

them. Then, after a brief expository chapter, the Joads immediately happen upon an instance of kindness as similarly self-propagating: Mae, a waitress, sells bread and sweets to a man and his sons for drastically reduced prices. Some truckers at the coffee shop see this interchange and leave Mae an extra-large tip.

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

When the novel begins, the Joad family relies on a traditional family structure in which the men make the decisions and the women obediently do as they are told. So invested are they in these roles that they continue to honor Grampa as the head of the family, even though he has outlived his ability to act as a sound leader. As the Joads journey west and try to make a living in California, however, the family dynamic changes drastically. Discouraged and defeated by his mounting failures, Pa withdraws from his role as leader and spends his days tangled in thought. In his stead, Ma assumes the responsibility of making decisions for the family. At first, this shocks Pa, who, at one point, lamely threatens to beat her into her so-called proper place. The threat is empty, however, and the entire family knows it. By the end of the novel, the family structure has undergone a revolution, in which the woman figure, traditionally powerless, has taken control, while the male figure, traditionally in the leadership role, has retreated. This revolution parallels a similar upheaval in the larger economic hierarchies in the outside world. Thus, the workers at the Weedpatch camp govern themselves according to their own rules and share tasks in accordance with notions of fairness and equality rather than power-hungry ambition or love of authority.

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Rose of Sharon's pregnancy holds the promise of a new beginning. When she delivers a stillborn baby, that promise seems broken. But rather than slipping into despair, the family moves boldly and gracefully forward, and the novel ends on a surprising (albeit unsettling) note of hope. In the last few pages of his book, Steinbeck employs many symbols, a number of which refer directly to episodes in the Bible. The way in which Uncle John disposes of the child's corpse recalls Moses being sent down the Nile. The image suggests that the family, like the Hebrews in Egypt, will be delivered from the slavery of its present circumstances.

When the Joads stop for gas not long after they begin their trip west, they are met by a hostile station attendant, who accuses them of being beggars and vagrants. While there, a fancy roadster runs down their dog and leaves it for dead in the middle of the road. The gruesome death constitutes the first of many symbols foreshadowing the tragedies that await the family.

CONCLUSIONS

The decade-long economic depression that began with the 1929 stock market crash had a profound influence on American arts and literature. Novelists, playwrights, photographers, and songwriters turned their attention to the plight of the poor. The Federal Art Project, the Federal Writers' Project, and the Federal Theater Project were created by the Works Progress Administration.

John Steinbeck, as simply one man among many, experienced the customary personal triumphs and tragedies - births, marriages, deaths, departures from old homes, and arrivals at new ones.

I do not know what decisive experience determined Steinbeck to be a writer rather than something else. Although he has given no personal equivalent of Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", the boy Jody in *The Red Pony*, who dreams of finding new way to lead the people, just as his grandfather led them across the prairies, seems almost surely an evocation of Steinbeck himself during the years that shaped his character.

Steinbeck's life spanned exactly two-thirds of the century that saw Americans change from horse-drawn provincials to jet-propelled Neapolitans: that saw the United States change from a great Mecca for immigrations seeking freedom and personal dignity to an exclusionist country - a closed corporation with limited preference for the kindred of earliest shareholders; and that also saw this country change from sanctuary rigidly isolated from international power politics to a self-appointed world policeman hopelessly bogged down in a thankless struggle in a remote area of the world.

The pattern of Steinbeck's life followed remarkably closely the most typical American pattern of his era. Born in tranquil, narrowly moralistic rural community, he left the countryside to go to college and then try his luck in the big city. His election of a writing career was not entirely characteristic, but his initial disgruntlement with the "big town" was characteristic of the "Waste Land" years. Achieving at last successes beyond anything he

imagined or feared, he migrated permanently to America's biggest city and became a kind of citizen of the world, ending his days as a counselor to the mighty.

Steinbeck based his stories on his observations rather than on his personal crises, granted few interviews, and rarely appeared publicly. Although he wrote best about the places and persons he had known longest and best, he reserved for himself the role of quiet moralist. After winning the Nobel Prize, he was asked (during one of the few interviews in which he discussed literature) what he thought to be the major function of a present-day artist. He replied, "Criticism, I should think."¹

The author undeniable "decline" as an artist almost surely resulted from a confusion of the multiple forms that "criticism" may take. The journalist deplors, or more rarely commends, specific present actions. The artist, however, is not a reporter, but a magician who conjures up a new world that provides us with a perspective for examining ours. A serious artist is not a tactical, but strategic, critic; he is concerned not with specific happenings but with universal tendencies. (The kind of artist Steinbeck was when he wrote *Cannery Row*)

Quite early in his life the writer learned to know the poor, in particular the migrant farm workers and he wrote from their point of view. Although they suffer mistreatment and ruthless exploitation, the reader is left with a feeling that the poor can endure by sticking together. In terms of literary diversity, and variety of angles from which he viewed his world Steinbeck holds a unique position in American literature. Only few other writers can match his powerful talent of dealing with human dignity and human pride in adversity.

Winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize for literature, the American author John Steinbeck is best remembered for his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck's story of a family of farm workers migrating from Oklahoma to California describes the hopelessness of the Great Depression era.

The values of Steinbeck's world are based on social realities of a world that has almost disappeared. Essentially, it is a world in which standards can be readily formulated and achievement readily judged; where competence is measured in terms of the handyman or the generalist; where events move slowly or at least time is not fully scheduled; where angst does not exist; where the incomprehensible is readily accepted as mystery; where people in frequent contact with more vulgar facts of life lack at least some genteel squeamishness and perhaps

some theoretical brutality; where men recognize but are not obsessed by class distinctions or separated by specialization.

One of the engaging qualities of Steinbeck's attitude towards work is his matter-of-fact acceptance of it, combined with a sense of natural piety and ritual. For Steinbeck work is what one does in order to live. He never elevates process into a mystique, but he has a strong sense of natural rhythms and laws that must be observed in work. Basically, Steinbeck seems to think that illusions derive from the instinct for survival and the instinct for reproduction, in that order the two basic laws of life. Thus man, as individual and as species, must change and adapt; but change denies or seems to deny absolutes, and men fear change (as do Muley Graves in *The Grapes of Wrath*).

The pattern of exodus and settlement is found, of course, in Scripture and in American history, and Steinbeck used conscious parallels from both in his fiction; but the impulse towards that pattern must have come from within, of his own family's movement, always from New England to the Salinas Valley, always from narrowness to the promise of plenty, always a defeat of the dream because of the infidelity of wife or child or nature. These characters are not, satirized because they are illusioned; instead, they are presented as men who trusted and were in a sense betrayed and are therefore figures not of tragedy, but of pathos.

Steinbeck most deeply sympathized with two contrasting types of men: those who could with open eyes pursue dreams to their logical conclusion; and those who were able to go beyond illusion to accept reality; (or like Samuel Hamilton who were able to recognize and accept their own mediocrity).

The Grapes of Wrath continues to have an impact on society, both from political and artistic perspectives. Author T.C. Boyle published a book with a similar perspective in 1995 called *The Tortilla Curtain*, in which he shifts the focus from the challenges faced by the Dust Bowl migrant workers to the lives of contemporary Mexican immigrants. Boyle says that the effort Steinbeck made to remedy injustice inspired him to imagine a new reality in a world that hasn't changed as much as it would like to believe.

Only death frees man from change, and only those who are aware of the rhythms of life can penetrate this secret and accept it. This, then, is the most important cause of Steinbeck's detachment and apparently baseless optimism: man will be defeated by change, but he can overcome the fear of defeat by understanding and acceptance.

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