

The Grapes of Wrath: An Achievement of Genius

by Peter Lisca

Steinbeck is frequently identified as a proletarian writer of the nineteen thirties, one whose dominant interest lay in the social and political problems of the Great Depression. But although *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men* might generally seem to justify this reputation, neither work is specifically dated either by its materials or by Steinbeck's treatment. Migrant workers and union organizers had long been part of the California scene—and continued so to be. Steinbeck's early short story, "The Raid" (1934), dealing with two labor organizers, similarly avoids identification with its decade. It was not until 1939, at the very end of the period, that he published *The Grapes of Wrath*, a work clearly and specifically grounded in conditions and events that were then making news. In fact, so directly and powerfully did this novel deal with contemporary events that it itself became an important part of those events—debated in public forums, banned, burned, denounced from pulpits, attacked in pamphlets, and even debated on the floor of Congress. Along with such works as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Grapes of Wrath* has achieved a place among those novels that so stirred the American public for a social cause as to have had measurable political impact. Although thus associated with this class of social-protest fiction, *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to be read, not as a piece of literary or social history, but with a sense of emotional involvement and aesthetic discovery. More than any other American novel, it successfully embodies a contemporary social

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problem of national scope in an artistically viable expression. It is unquestionably John Steinbeck's finest achievement, a work of literary genius.

To appreciate fully this accomplishment, it is important to keep in mind Steinbeck's independence from the extensive literary and political proletarian movements of the period. He took no part in the organized efforts of writers, critics, and scholars to promote leftist or Communist theory as fulfillment of their responsibility to society; nor was he personally committed to any political viewpoint. While this kind of ideological neutrality enabled him to escape the pitfall of being too close to his materials—prejudice and propaganda—Steinbeck's intimate knowledge of his materials contributes greatly to the novel's realism and hence to its authority.

This familiarity had started while he was still a boy working on the farms and ranches surrounding his hometown of Salinas; it had grown through his college years during vacation and drop-out periods. More recently, in the autumn of 1936, he had written an article on migrant labor for *The Nation*, and a series of seven articles on these "Harvest Gypsies" for the *San Francisco News*. Steinbeck's fiction had early shown an absorbing interest in man's relationship to the land. He had explored it in terms of myth and biology in *To a God Unknown*, communally in *The Pastures of Heaven*, and as a factor of maturation in the short stories of *The Red Pony*. But through the field trips he made and the reading he did in preparation for his articles, and through subjecting himself personally to the migrant experience by living and working with the laborers, he was able to extend considerably the range of his terms to include the economic and, in the largest sense, the political. The truth of his observation in these latter dimensions of *The Grapes of Wrath* has long been substantiated by historians, sociologists, and political scientists; the truth of the novel's vision of humanity has been proven again and again in the hearts of its readers.

The novel's main characters are the twelve members of the Joad family: Grampa, Granma, Pa, Ma, their children Winfield, Ruthie, Noah, Al, Tom (just returned from prison), Rosasharn and her husband Connie, and Uncle John, joined by the ex-preacher Jim Casy. Dispossessed of their Oklahoma homestead by the banks having foreclosed the mortgage on their property, after the impoverished soil and dust storms made it impossible for them to support themselves, the group leaves for California, where they expect to find work as field hands. Meanwhile their land is joined

to that of other unfortunate neighbors and worked with huge tractors. During the long journey the Joads find that they are part of a large migration of people with whom they share dangers and privations—especially the Wilson family. Grampa and Granma Joad die, and Noah leaves the group en route. The rest of them arrive in California to find the labor market glutted with families like themselves, resented and disliked by the inhabitants, exploited mercilessly by the large growers and oppressed by the police. Connie deserts the family; Jim Casy is arrested, appears later as a labor organizer but is killed by vigilantes, one of whom is in return killed by Tom, who then becomes a fugitive; Rosasharn's baby is born dead, and the novel ends with the Joads and their new friends, the Wainwrights, being even more hungry, ill, and impoverished than they were at the start.

All the characters are drawn as fully credible human beings, individual yet also representative of their social class and circumstances. This is true even of such clearly unusual and strong personalities as Tom Joad, Jim Casy, Ma Joad, and her daughter Rosasharn. Casy, although a vision-pierced prophet, retains enough elements of his revival-meeting, "Jesus-jumping" sect and cultural folkways to remain specifically human. Ma Joad's heroic maternal qualities reflect the strength and character of those migrant wives who not only survived but nourished as well their children and husbands. Steinbeck may have had these women especially in mind when he chose the title "Their Blood Is Strong" for the republication of his *San Francisco News* articles. Such details as Grampa's senility, Al's abilities as an automobile mechanic, Connie's faith in cheap, correspondence trade schools, Uncle John's guilt complex, and Rosasharn's pregnancy personalize each character in turn and contribute to the reader's involvement. But Steinbeck was not writing a novel of personal adventure and misfortune. His theme is the entire social condition of which his characters are a part, and it is primarily in terms of the total situation that they have existence. Thus their role is collective, representational of the Okies and migrant workers, just as in the novel the Shawnee Land and Cattle Company represents the evicting landlords, and the California Farmers' Association represents the growers.

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novel's vast subject requires even more. To have put the Joads into the large variety of situations needed to add up to a total picture would have destroyed their necessary credibility as particular and real people. Rather than vastly increasing the number of characters and thus weakening the reader's empathetic response and the novel's narrative line, or digressing from the action with authorial comment, Steinbeck conceived the idea of using alternating chapters as a way of filling in the larger picture. About one hundred pages, or one sixth of the book, is devoted to this purpose. At first glance it might seem that putting these digressions from the Joad family into separate chapters interrupts the narrative line even more, and that such a device breaks the book into two distinct parts, or kinds of chapters, resulting in a monotonous tick tock effect. Of this danger the author was well aware, and he avoided it by using in the interchapters a variety of devices to minimize their interruption of the narrative action, temper their expository nature, and otherwise blend the two kinds of chapters in the reader's mind.

Perhaps the most important of the devices Steinbeck uses is dramatization. Chapter five, for example, deals with the process by which mortgaged lands are taken over by the banks, the small farmers evicted, and these lands combined into vast holdings cultivated with efficient modern machinery by absentee landlords. Whereas such previous writers in the naturalist tradition as Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris would have addressed the reader directly on these points, giving him a well-researched lecture, Steinbeck presents a series of vignettes in which, through generalized characters, situations, and dialogue, we see these things happening. The device is reminiscent of the medieval mystery plays which dramatized Bible stories and made them real to the common people; or of Greek drama which through familiar figures and a chorus of elders or women gave voice to the people's ethical and religious beliefs. Even the introduction and the transitions between these vignettes share this dramatized quality, as in the opening paragraph of chapter five, in which "owners" are presented walking, talking, touching things, and "tenants" are listening, watching, squatting in the dust which they mark with their little sticks, their wives standing in the doorways, the children wriggling their toes. In similar fashion other chapters present further aspects of the total situation: chapter seven, the buying of

used cars for the trip; chapter nine, the selling of household goods; chapters seventeen and twenty-three, the nature of migrant life along the road.

Another device that Steinbeck uses to integrate the two kinds of material is juxtaposition. Of course, everything included in the interchapters is related to the events of the narrative. And each interchapter is so placed that its content is most pertinent to the action in the chapter that precedes or follows it. Highway 66 is the subject of the interchapter that follows the Joads' turning onto that highway; the rain and flood of chapter twenty-nine set the stage for the novel's conclusion. But furthermore, and most effectively, the interchapters are frequently used to develop or complete some specific action initiated in the preceding narrative, or vice versa. Chapter eight ends with the Joads driving off to sell their household goods; the interchapter that follows presents us with generalized characters selling just such goods; in chapter ten the Joads return with the empty truck, having sold their goods, pack the truck, and leave home; chapter eleven describes the gradual deterioration of an abandoned house. A variation of this device is achieved by repetition, in which some specific detail in one kind of chapter reappears in the other, thus further knitting the two together. The anonymous house in an interchapter becomes the Joad house when, in the following chapter, the latter also is seen with one of its corners knocked off the foundation; the anonymous man with a rifle who in the same interchapter threatens the tractor driver becomes Grampa Joad, who in the next chapter is reported to have shot out the headlight of a tractor.

To temper the expository nature of the interchapters and blend them with the rest, Steinbeck works with the prose style itself. The colorful folk idiom and figurative language used by the Joads, Wilsons, Wainwrights, and other migrants reappear in the dramatizations of the interchapters as the language also of the generalized characters. But (except for a brief oversight in chapter five) the conversation in the interchapters is not marked off by quotation marks, thus emphasizing its generalized nature and at the same time further blending it into other elements in these same chapters, weakening the identity and separateness of the more directly expository passages. Finally, through frequent variations in prose rhythm and idiom specifically pertinent to a particular scene, any tendency to group the expository chapters

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aged. Consider, for example, the variety of effects presented by
chapter three on the turtle, chapter seven on the selling of used
cars, chapter twenty-five on the California harvest.

There is, however, another important element of continuity in
the prose style, in addition to the spoken idiom of its generalized
characters. From the opening chapter, describing the drought, to
the penultimate one, describing the flood with which the novel
ends, the syntactical structures and rhythms of the narrative voice
are those of the King James Bible: "The tractors had lights shining,
for there is no day and night for a tractor and the discs turn the
earth in the darkness and they glitter in the daylight." Almost
disappearing in some of the chapters and totally possessing others,
this voice, through its inescapable association with the Bible, be-
comes the moral center of the novel. It speaks with the force and
authority of an Old Testament prophet, some Jeremiah harangu-
ing a sinful people: "There is a crime here that goes beyond
denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot sym-
bolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The
fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks and the ripe
fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit
cannot be taken from an orange."

All this is not to say that the sixteen interchapters are equally
brilliant or successful. Perhaps three of them (nineteen, twenty-
one, twenty-five), concerned with historical information, and a few
paragraphs in two or three others, are too direct. But these are
exceptions. For the most part, the problem raised by the use of
interchapters is fully met by the brilliance of Steinbeck's literary
technique.

In themselves, then, the interchapters accomplish several things
for the novel. As has been mentioned, they provide an artistically
acceptable place for the author's own statements, and they make
possible the inclusion of additional materials without overusing
the Joads or introducing many other specific characters. Closely
related to this latter function is these chapters' capacity for ampli-
fication. They present dramatically with a sense of real experience
what would otherwise be left to inference—that the situations and
actions of the Joad family are typical of a large group of people,
that the Joads are caught up in a problem of national dimensions.
These are perhaps the chapters' most important uses. In addition,

they provide information—the history of land ownership and migrant labor in California, for example. Also, through their depiction of American people, scenes, and folkways, there emerges the portrait of a substantial portion of a people—their political and religious beliefs, their music, manners, stories, jokes; their essentially pioneer character, with its virtues and its limitations. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a “great American novel” in every sense of that phrase.

The brilliance of conception and technique with which Steinbeck manages the larger units of his novel is equally evident in its small details. This is well illustrated by the migrants’ frequent use of animals in their figures of speech, as natural to these people as literary references to professors of English. A tractor pushing over a shed “give her a shake like a dog shakes a rat”; Al, in his sexual pride, behaves like “a dung-hill rooster”; when all the Joads are forced to move into one house, Muley describes them as “piled in John’s house like gophers in a winter burrow.” Casy, the most intellectual of the Joad group, sometimes elaborates these simple figures of speech in his attempt to understand a new idea or express it to others—as when he envisions the socioeconomic forces in terms of a gila monster with its poison and its unbreakable hold, or compares the plight of the migrants to that of a bird trapped in an attic, trying to escape.

The narrative passages also make use of animals, but tend to employ them symbolically rather than figuratively. At the beginning of their journey the Joads’ dog is killed on the highway by a “big swift car” which does not even stop. Another dog, the “lean brown mongrel . . . nervous and flexed to run” who upon sight of strangers “leaped sideways, and fled, ears back, bony tail clamped protectively” symbolized the conditions of the “Hooverville,” a group of cardboard and tin shanties, in which his owner lives. A jackrabbit that gets smashed on the highway, lean gray cats, birds, snakes, and even bugs—all appear under perfectly natural circumstances and yet serve also as symbols. The most extended example of this is the turtle that is accorded the first interchapter entirely to itself. The indomitable life force that drives the turtle, the toughness that allows it to survive predators and trucks, the efficiency of nature that uses the turtle to unwittingly carry seeds and bury them, are clearly characteristic also of the Joads. They, too, carry their house (the truck) with them, survive the natural catastrophe of drought and flood and the intimidations of police

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Steinbeck’s use similarly brilliant turtle, so the sea through its blind impersonal industry the economic cold end to the Joads’ the land as it was, did not stamp the earth. . . . No man Men ate what the bread. Behind the with blades—not twelve curved iron gears, raping me Steinbeck in this machinery, but ra If this tractor were the long furrows that tractor then. land and turns us

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and vigilantes; they, too, pick up life in one place and carry it to another. This correspondence is further strengthened when in the very next chapter Tom picks up a turtle as a present for the younger children, talks about turtles with Casy, and eventually releases it to travel—as the Joads are to do—southwest.

Steinbeck’s use of machine imagery, though not so extensive, is similarly brilliant. As the first interchapter was devoted to the turtle, so the second is devoted mostly to the tractor, which through its blind power and lack of feeling comes to symbolize the impersonal industrialization and mechanization which, following the economic collapse of their family homestead, is bringing an end to the Joads’ old way of life: “The driver . . . could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. . . . No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. Behind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades—not plowing but surgery. . . . the long seeders—twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasm set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion.” Not that Steinbeck in this chapter, or in the book, is symbolizing the evils of machinery, but rather the evils of its misuse. “Is a tractor bad? . . . If this tractor were ours it would be good. . . . If our tractor turned the long furrows of our land, it would be good. . . . We could love that tractor then. . . . But this tractor does two things—it turns the land and turns us off the land.”

The tractor as symbol of a new era appears almost exclusively in the first part of the book; the most pervasive machine imagery is that of cars and trucks, from the shiny red transport which brings Tom home from prison to the broken-down jalopies of the migrants and the sleek new touring cars of the wealthy and the landowners. As a man used to be judged by the horse he rode, so now his social position is revealed by his car; as a man used to have to know about galls, chipped hooves, curb chains, saddle sores, he now must know about tires, valves, bearings, and spark plugs. “Funny how you fellas can fix a car. Jus’ light right in an’ fix her,” Casy says to Tom and Al. “I couldn’t fix no car, not even now when I seen you do it.” “Got to grow into her when you’re a little kid,” Tom said. “It ain’t jus’ knowin’. It’s more’n that.” Survival, whether of man or animals, rests upon the ability to adapt to or master the new factors of environment. The Joads have this ability.

Even before the moment comes when they are to leave their home, they instinctively gather around the truck that is to carry them to California: "The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. . . . This was the new hearth, the living center of the family." From this beginning, through various tire punctures, flickering headlights, and boiling radiators, to the ending, in which "the old car stood, and water fouled the ignition wires and water fouled the carburetors," the condition of the Joads and their fellow migrants is the condition of their machines.

Powerful and unstinting as these machine images are in their reflection of the Joads' physical condition, there is developed at the same time a counterthrust which makes the novel a cry not of despair but of hope and affirmation. This thrust begins with Casy's early self-questioning and ends with Rosasharn breastfeeding a starving old man. The migrants journey west along Highway 66, but also along the unmapped roads of social change, from an old concept of community lost in the blowing dust of the opening chapter, or forfeited by foreclosed mortgages, to a new and very different sense of community formulated gradually on the new social realities. In an interchapter (seventeen), Steinbeck gives us this process in the abstract, and it is detailed in both kinds of chapters throughout the book.

Not all, however, can participate in this process. Muley Graves (a suggestive name) stays behind in Oklahoma, living in a cave like an animal because he cannot separate his sense of community and identity from the land and its history of personal experiences: "Place where folks live is them folks." As the generalized migrants in one of the interchapters express it to the buyers of their household goods, "You are not buying only junk, you're buying junked lives. . . . How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past?" Grampa Joad, like Muley, cannot bear to leave the land. He is given an overdose of painkiller and carried off it, but he does not make it beyond the Oklahoma border. Casy's little funeral speech assures the folks that "Grampa didn't die tonight. He died the minute you took 'im off the place. . . . Oh, he was breathin', but he was dead. He was that place, an' he knowed it. . . . He's jus' stayin' with the lan'. He couldn't leave it." As it is expressed in one of the interchapters, "This land, this red land is us; and the flood years and the dust years and the drought years are us."

The old sense of land and possession must be left behind. Ma Joad's role. Ma Joad's space in the decision that decision is things. It is Casy's group of people acknowledged places on the truck the cab on a corner was young and is also evident in the pork. Ma "said though he suggested said finally." They come in the scene role: "It's all women's or women deprived of its land Joad who, as well order and survival

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The old sense of identity and community is invested not only in land and possessions, but in social customs and mores that also must be left behind; for example, traditional male and female roles. Ma Joad may be consulted briefly concerning food and space in the decision to include Casy in the family group, but once that decision is made she goes back to the house and womanly things. It is Casy who takes his place among the planning men grouped around Grampa, whose patriarchal headship must be acknowledged despite his senility. Similarly, when they take their places on the truck, Rosasharn, although pregnant, cannot sit in the cab on a comfortable seat: "This was impossible because she was young and a woman." The traditional distinction in social role is also evident in Ma's embarrassment at Casy's offer to salt down the pork. Ma "stopped her work then and inspected him oddly, as though he suggested a curious thing. . . . 'It's women's work,' she said finally." The preacher's reply is significant of many changes to come in the sense of community and the individual's changing role: "It's all work," he says. "They's too much of it to split up to men's or women's work." By the end of the book, the male role, deprived of its breadwinner status, loses also its authority. It is Ma Joad who, as woman and Earth Mother, becomes the nucleus of order and survival.

It is fitting that this break with domestic tradition should be announced by Casy, the spiritual leader of his community. He has already abandoned preaching the hell-fire, blood-of-the-Lamb evangelism which is typified in the book through the recollections of Pa Joad, when the spirit took him, "jumpin' an' yellin' " and Granma "talkin' in tongues." This primitive religion is also dramatically presented in Uncle John's sense of guilt and Mrs. Sandry's frightening of Rosasharn with predictions of the horrible penalties God visits on pregnant women who see a play or do "clutch-an'-hug dancin'." Significantly, during the happiest moment in the book, the dance at the federal migrant camp, "The Jesus-lovers sat and watched, their faces hard and contemptuous. They did not speak to one another, they watched for sin, and their faces condemned the whole proceeding."

Casy's new direction rejects such theological notions of sin ("There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do."); it defines the religious impulse as human love ("What's this call, this sperit? . . . It's love."); and it identifies the Holy Spirit as the human spirit in all mankind ("Maybe all men

got one big soul ever'body's a part of"). Casy joins the migration not to escape or to preach but to learn from the common human experience: "I'm gonna work in the fiel's, in the green fiel's, an' I'm gonna try to learn. . . why the folks walks in the grass, gonna hear 'em talk, gonna hear 'em sing. Gonna listen to kids eatin' mush. Gonna hear husban' an' wife poundin' the mattress in the night. Gonna eat with 'em an' learn." What Casy finally learns, in jail after giving himself up to save Tom and Floyd, is that man's spiritual brotherhood must express itself in a social unity, which is why he becomes a labor organizer. The grace that he reluctantly says before eating his first breakfast with the Joads is already groping in that direction: "I got to thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harness'd to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy." It is for this belief in a new sense of community that he gives his life, rediscovering for himself his American heritage of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Over Soul," Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*.

Although varying considerably in their ability to share Casy's spiritual vision, it is the Joads' growing acceptance of the social application of that vision that gives them and the other migrants their strength to endure and their faith in a better future. Even Muley knows why he must share his stringy wild rabbit with Tom and Casy: "What I mean, if a fella's got somepin to eat an' another fella's hungry—why, the first fella ain't got no choice." Mrs. Wilson's answer to Ma Joad's thanks for help puts it differently: "People needs [have the need] to help." A few pages later, Ma Joad's reply to Mrs. Wilson's thanks for help gives the concept a further turn: "You can't let help go unwanted." It is significant that the first example of spontaneous sharing with strangers on the journey is a symbolic merging of two families: Grampa's death in the Wilsons' tent, his burial in one of their quilts with a page torn from their Bible; Ma Joad's promise to care for Mrs. Wilson. As Pa Joad expresses it later, "We almost got a kin bond." Near the end of the novel, Al Joad tears down the tarpaulin that hangs between themselves and the Wainwrights, so that "the two families in the car were one." In one of the most hauntingly beautiful scenes

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of the book, a family spontaneously shares their breakfast with a stranger (Tom), and their hard-found paying job as well, even though this shortens the time between themselves and starvation.

Consider in contrast the Joads' neighbor who turned tractor driver: "I got a wife an' my wife's mother. Them people got to eat. Fust an on'y thing I got to think about is my own folks." Ma Joad herself starts out on the journey with a ferocious defense of her own family against all things, because "All we got is the fambly"; four hundred pages later she has learned, "Use' ta be the fambly was first. It ain't so now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do." Tom Joad has learned in prison to mind his own business and to live one day at a time. As he puts it, "I'm just puttin' one foot in front a the other," and again a few pages later, "I ruther jus' lay one foot down in front a the other"; in another image, "I climb fences when I got fences to climb." By the end of the book he says, "But I know now a fella ain't no good alone"; and he goes out dedicated to work for the improvement of his people, though it may mean his own death: "Then it don't matter. Then I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there."

These are only a few of the particulars that key into chapter seventeen's most abstract statement: "They shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. . . . twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all." The family of man is established, the change from "I" to "we," the new sense of identity and community through which the people survive. Those who do not share, who continue selfish and distrustful, "worked at their own doom and did not know it."

Of all the abstract statements, generalized examples, and specific acts addressed to this principle of survival, Steinbeck saved the most powerful for the novel's concluding scene. In Rosasharn's feeding of a stranger with the milk from her own breast is reenacted the primal act of human nourishment and the most intimate expression of human kinship. That the stranger is an old man and that, for physical reasons, Rosasharn is glad to give the milk, which continues to gather painfully in her breast although her baby is dead, make its symbolic assertion all the stronger. The significance of this final act is further magnified by the facts that the old man is weak from giving his share of the food to his son, and that the son had "stoled some bread" for him but the father had "puked it all up." The ultimate nourishment is the sharing of

oneself, as Rosasharn symbolizes by literally giving of her body. This act takes on religious overtones by the still, mysterious, and lingering quality of the scene as "her lips came together and smiled mysteriously" (the last words of the novel), suggesting a common subject of religious paintings—the Madonna nursing her child whom she knows to be the Son of God.

These overtones do more than enhance a humanistic symbol, however. They bring to conclusion a whole level of the novel that exists in religious terms beginning with the title itself, *The Grapes of Wrath*, a phrase from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" that alludes to the Book of Revelation in the Bible, containing prophecies of the coming Apocalypse: "And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." The reference is reinforced in one of the novel's interchapters: "In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, heavy for the vintage." From this beginning, the Biblical allusions follow thick and fast, for Steinbeck enlarges the significance of his Okies' experiences by associating them with those of the Israelites (the chosen people) in the Old Testament and thus suggesting their human and historical importance. Although not formally so divided, the novel falls into three parts: the drought and dispossession (chapters 1–11), the journey (chapters 12–18), and the arrival in California (chapters 19–30). This corresponds respectively to the oppression and bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, their Exodus and wandering in the wilderness, and their entrance into the Land of Canaan. The plagues in Egypt, which released the Israelites, have their parallel in the drought and erosion in Oklahoma; the Egyptian oppressors, in the bank officials; the hostile Canaanites, in the equally hostile Californians. In both accounts the Promised Land is first glimpsed from a mountain top. As there were twelve tribes of Israel, so are there twelve Joads (counting Rosasharn's husband). Even the family name recalls a parallel—the tribe of Judah, or the Jews. Ma Joad's simple faith that "We're the people," is reminiscent of the Jewish faith in God's promise that the Jews are a chosen people, as expressed in Psalm Ninety-five: "For He is the Lord our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." As the Jews formulated new codes of law by which they governed themselves in their Exodus (see the Book of Deuteronomy), so the migrants evolve new codes of conduct (see chapter seventeen). When Uncle John sets Rosasharn's baby in an apple box among the willow stems of a stream,

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As a humanistic symbol, the level of the novel that the title itself, *The Grapes of Wrath* of the Republic" that is possible, containing prophetic thrust in his sickle over the earth, and cast it into the future. The reference is reinforced: "In the souls of the working heavy, heavy for biblical allusions follow the significance of his Okies' sense of the Israelites (the land thus suggesting their plight though not formally so did the drought and dispossession chapters 12-18), and the land thus corresponds respectively the Israelites in Egypt, the messiah, and their entrance into Egypt, which released the land and erosion in Oklahoma officials; the hostile Okies. In both accounts the mountain top. As there are twelve Joads (counting Uncle John recalls a parallel—simple faith that "We're faithful in God's promise as expressed in Psalm Ninety-five are the people of his time the Jews formulated new laws for themselves in their Exodus. The laws evolve new codes. Uncle John sets Rosa's yellow stems of a stream,

saying, "Go down an' tell 'em," it is the counterpart of Moses in a basket among the bulrushes. A Negro spiritual completes the allusion for the reader: "Let my people go." These are but a scattered sampling of the many, often quite specific parallels through which Steinbeck—in addition to the recurring Biblical prose style mentioned earlier—sustains in the novel a strong religious presence.

The Biblical parallels of three of the novel's characters, however, are [*sic*] of such significance and complexity that they require further discussion—Casy, Tom, and Rosasharn. Jim Casy is, as his initials suggest, in several ways a Christ figure. He breaks with the old religious beliefs and practices, of which he was an advocate, and after a retreat "in the hills, thinkin', almost you might say like Jesus went into the wilderness," emerges to preach an initially unpopular new testament, rejecting a god of vengeance for an oversoul of love. "You can't hold no church with idears like that," Tom tells him. "People would drive you out of the country. . . ." He dedicates himself to establishing his "church" among the people and is killed uttering as his last words a paraphrase of Christ's "They know not what they do": "You don' know what you're a-doin'"; Tom, who has been a doubter all along, now announces himself as Casy's disciple. It all fits together very neatly, too neatly. Steinbeck, however, like other modern American writers, such as Faulkner, is not content to use elements of Christian myth on the simple level of allegory. Thus Casy's Christ role is deliberately confused in two ways. First, he is given attributes of John the Baptist, such as the description of his speech as "a voice out of the ground," and, of course, his role as a baptizer. One of those he clearly remembers baptizing is Tom Joad, and thus the second area of confusion.

For Tom Joad, too, beginning with his baptism by Casy, is given the attributes of a Christ figure. He is even called "Jesus Meek" by his fellow prisoners because of his grandmother's Christmas card with that phrase on it. Once when he seems to be rebelling against his emerging role and says he wants to "go out like Al. . . get mad like Pa. . . drunk like Uncle John," his mother shakes her head. "You can't, Tom. I know. I knowed from the time you was a little fella. You can't. They's some folks that's just theirselves an' nothin' more. . . Ever'thing you do is more'n you. . . You're spoke for." In other words, his succession to the role of Christ the Messiah, or Saviour, is complete when, in a scene rife with womb imagery (mother, cave, food, darkness), Tom is figuratively reborn and tells

his mother of his vocation to preach and live the words of Casy. His speech, quoted in small part above (page 106), paraphrases the words of Christ recorded in Luke 4:18 and Matthew 7:3 and 25:35-45, as well as in Isaiah 65:21-22: "And they shall build houses and inhabit them, they shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat." Tom Joad is a complex figure, and it is possible to see in him also sufficient attributes (a specific act of violence, for example) to identify him as a type of Moses who will lead his people to a better future, or the apostle Paul, particularly in the specific details of his conversion.

Though not so rich a figure, Rosasharn also gathers to herself multiple Christian aspects. To begin with, her real name, Rose of Sharon, from the Song of Solomon ("I am the Rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys") is frequently interpreted as referring to Christ. The Song of Solomon also contains the line, "This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes." Thus the final scene in which she feeds the old man with her milk is symbolic of the Eucharist: "Take, eat, this is my body. . . ." Through this identification, the anonymous old man becomes Grampa Joad, whose image for the plenty of California had been a "big bunch a grapes" which he could squash on his face until the juice ran down his chin. As both Christ and Madonna figures, Rosasharn combines attributes more divergent than does Casy (Christ and John the Baptist) or even Tom (Moses, Christ, Saint Paul).

Probably because of this very diversity of reference, these three characters greatly contribute to the lively tension of Biblical allusions in the novel's prose style, events, and structure. The novel never falls into allegory. Furthermore, and more important, they bring together and make one in their lives the novel's social message and certain precepts of Christianity. Whether *The Grapes of Wrath* as a whole promulgates specifically Christian values is a moot point depending entirely on one's definition of what is essentially Christian. Both sides have been well argued. There is no question, however, that through the abundance, variety, and intensity of its Biblical allusions the novel imbues its social message with a religious fervor and sanction.

When *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in 1939, one reviewer said that it seemed to him "as great a book as has yet come out of America." The passing of time has given no reason for correcting that estimate.

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