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**Department of English**

**The American society During the Great Depression in John  
Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath***

*An extended essay submitted to the Department of English as a  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in  
Literature and Civilization*

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# **Dedication**

To everyone who has been everyone to me

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## Abstract

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck is an American classic novel known for its extraordinary descriptive quality. It gained this title due to its strong word painting techniques and its socio-economic implications. It is about the American low-class fugitive families who were oppressed by both the richer capitalists and the government. This New Historicist-based research aims to shed light on the social status of the American community during the Great Depression. Besides, it shows to what extent John Steinbeck could make use of his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* as a tool to provide valuable historical insight through demonstrating the social themes and the American philosophies that were seminal during the Great depression.

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# **General Introduction**

## **General Introduction**

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### **General Introduction**

The Great Depression was one of the most desperate periods in American history if not the only one. The Stock Market Crash of October 1929 that was henceforth commonly known as the Black Tuesday coupled with the sharp drought that hit the American Midwest (Kansas, Colorado, Texas and mainly Oklahoma) marked the end to the happiest decade of the United States history, the Roaring Twenties, replacing it with a decade of depression, distress, hardships and wrath. The decade was named accurately the Great Depression. By the first years of the nineteen thirties, almost a quarter of the population was unemployed; most of them endured poverty, hunger or jail for the theft they committed, banks were left alone for most customers pulled out their money fearing that the banking system failure turns out to be theirs as well. Farmers in the Oklahoma Panhandle, as a primary affected subject to the drought, had their only trade, mainly crops, hideously destroyed. Being under such status quo, most farmers had been forced to move westward to the promised land of California seeking better economic conditions by working in fruit fields.

The Great Depression was a period of suffering, distress, and misery, yet it was a material of kind for writers to produce literary works with themes that differ from those of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and T.S. Eliot who had put their names on the modernists' canon a few years before. Thereupon, it came the age of John Steinbeck, who had produced a set of fine novellas along the ten years of the Great Depression. For him, the Great Depression was a source of inspiration for his literary prosperity during which he published his famous Dustbowl Trilogy (*In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *the Grapes of Wrath*).

Among Steinbeck's Great Depression related works, *The Grapes of Wrath* ranks as the best short novel of its genre, as the great majority of critics considered it. It was wildly successful to the point that it won Steinbeck the Pulitzer Prize, the Nobel Prize for Literature and the National Book Award. It was published on Friday, April, 14th 1939, and had sold more than 14 million copies in the past 75 years.



## General Introduction

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In his masterpiece, Steinbeck describes the struggles of a farm family "the Joads" who are dispossessed from their lands in their journey from Oklahoma to reach the promised west during the Great Depression. Steinbeck has been sure that he is on the qui vive for a proper portrayal of the conditions and the hardships they encounter. He has attempted to realistically depict the inhuman life of all immigrant families of the 1930's American society and he successfully did. In a nutshell, *The Grapes of Wrath* can be fairly said to be a mirror which reflects the life of America of that epoch as well as the personal experience of Steinbeck that was palpably seen in its chapters.

The selection of this topic "The American Society during the Great Depression in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*", specifically, has come into existence due to some reasons, some are objective and some are subjective motivations. First, the significance lies in the fact that this research is made with the intention of demonstrating the reality of the American social status during the decade of the depression. Oftentimes, *The Grapes of Wrath* has been studied from linguistic, cultural, psychological or ideological angles. Hitherto, the New-Historicist studies to the novel are less recorded. However, the 1930's were a decade of depression in America as the period between 1945 to 1969 was one of anxiety in Britain, hence, it would be of much help to know one's self to analyze an epoch through one of its literary production. Additionally, the distinctiveness of the decade of the Great Depression from its preceding and following ones coupled with the extraordinary descriptive attribute of the short novel *The Grapes of Wrath* drove me to devote my graduating dissertation to this topic.

After having a thorough knowledge about Great Depression and *The Grapes of Wrath*, one can adequately feel the reflection of the time in the novel. Thus, the present extended essay throws the following central poser:

To what extent John Steinbeck could use his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* as a tool to depict the quotidian American life during the years of the Great Depression?

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The current study suggests that regardless *The Grapes of Wrath* was and is still considered as a noticeable advancement in Steinbeck's career as a writer; it deserves the epithet of being the one of the novels that mirror the American life back the years of the American Great Depression. Steinbeck has also been realistic as he mimics the American life back then and comments on it as well. It is quite methodological that this study will end up by proving the hypothesis.

After collecting the required resources which are mainly books, articles, and websites, the present extended essay operates under the analytical approach in a complementary fashion with the New Historicist theory that runs under a changing focus; starting from the historical context then to the novel being studied then scrutinizing both interrelatedly.

The present extended essay is divided into three chapters. Chapter one that is entitled "Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression" scrutinizes the era that preceded the Great Depression namely the Roaring Twenties and the aspect in which prosperity occurs. Finally, there will be a stress on the Depression Era, causes, social and cultural effects and then a hint about the literature of the time as a smooth transition to the following chapter.

Chapter two is entitled "*The Grapes of Wrath: A Literary Study.*" In this chapter, there will be a biography and the major works of John Steinbeck to provide a clearer image of that writer, the inclusion of the writer's biography is to show what effects his journey of life had on his writing. Then, the chapter provides a literary analysis of the novel per se, including, synopsis and then motifs and symbols.

"*The Grapes of Wrath; a Portrayal of the American Society*" is the final and the practical chapter wherein the New Historicist theory is going to be applied. Thus, this chapter is going to be a deductive conclusion of the aforementioned scrutiny of previous chapters. It discusses, basically, the social themes depicted in the novel, and the American social philosophies that are reflected in the behaviours of the characters. Finally, the chapter infers the family structure and roles and the changes taking place in roles.



**Chapter One**  
**Historical**  
**Background;**  
**Prosperity and**  
**Depression**

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## **Chapter One: Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression**

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### **1.1. Introduction**

The period between the early nineteenth Century and all the way up to the nineteen thirties has witnessed unprecedented ups and down in the all United States history due to some external and internal factors. First, it was deeply affected by the aftermath of the First World War, and second, the U.S celebrated a decade of unusual prosperity that was known by the moniker of The Roaring Twenties. It was the most influencing periods of all the American history. But the Stock Market Crash<sup>1</sup> made an end to it. It led to the worst ten years of all the American history that were henceforward referred to as The Great Depression.

### **1.2. The Roaring Twenties**

The Roaring Twenties is one of the significant decades in the American history, it indicates the decade starting from 1923 to 1929 which was the start of the Great Depression. The twenties were distinctive years for America. The United States had made much profit out of the war. These profits were reflected on the society, many new tendencies came to existence. The decade, however, was strictly associated with Modernism. The traditional life was left behind for good and was swapped with a new one.

Unemployment was down, from 4,270,000 in 1921 to a little over 2 million in 1927. The general level of wages for workers rose. Some farmers made a lot of money. The 40 percent of all families who made over \$2,000 a year could buy new gadgets: autos, radios, refrigerators (Zinn 373).

The economic changes of the Roaring Twenties had profound effects on both the cultural and the social levels.

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<sup>1</sup> A severe downturn in equity prices that occurred in October of 1929 in the United States, and which marked the end of the "Roaring Twenties." The crash of 1929 did not occur in one day, but was spread out over a two-week period beginning in mid-October.

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### **1.2.1 Social and Cultural Effects of the Period**

The first affecting factor of the birth of the new life style was the extremely enhanced financial situation of the nation. Wages were remarkably and continuously on the rise, simultaneously, prices of all goods fell, resulting in a higher standard of living and a dramatic increase in consumer consumption ever experienced by Americans. The era was marked by a rebuilt of a new America; all social strata enjoyed nearly all life facilities. Not only this but there was also a noticeable shift in social and moral attitudes, as a new woman with a new look came to existence to take control and give the decade the epithet of the Booming Age.

The period was associated to modernism when modern technologies took over, including automobiles, radios, movies, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners etc. Furthermore, the unusual urbanism was also a shining logo the twenties. The change was rapidly taking place in all aspects of life "...during the twenties, the big city became the predatory instrument of modernization, prizing costly bigness and gaudy proliferation of material goods to be sold, enjoyed and discarded" (Shilder 284). The period was marked by a noticeable rise of Materialism in the society that was less Materialist few years before. Thus, many historians consider the twenties as the sole shifting point in the U.S in terms of politics, economy, morality, and culture.

Again, one of the significant things that gave the Twenties its distinctiveness was the genre of music that was wide-spread amongst all the social classes, namely Jazz Music. Jazz is an exclusively American type of music which had started around the beginning of the 20th century within African American communities in the Southern parts of United States from a unique combination between some typical African and European music traditions. The "hometown" of jazz is in New Orleans, therefore; early jazz musicians would call it their home even if they have never been there. Jazz spread throughout America very quickly and left its legacy in poetry, fashion (Wallenstein 1).

Jazz had been a result as well as a response to the popular craze that was taking over during the decade. The reasons that had made of Jazz music as an iconic music to

## **Chapter One: Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression**

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the twenties is its innovativeness, it was as new as anything else including dress, inventions, cinema and automobile. It was the newest of its genre for it is an amalgam of other genres created already. There was also the ways of dancing and dressing associated to Jazz music and, certainly, to the twenties. Jazz was not common for its newness only, other factor contributed in its spread, namely radio. Radio began to modify the American lifestyle. American people used radios as a means to keep themselves occupied at home or even at work. Presidential reports, comedy shows, news, events coverage, variety shows, drama, opera and jazz music were all available day long on radios (Ciment 270).

Moreover, movies or films, as known back the twenties, were a thing of interest to all the social classes of the United States. Hollywood, Los Angeles was the place in which all the films were made in. At that time, movies were not as they are now, they were in black and white and silent, Charlie Chaplin was the leading comedy figure. The numbers of people attending movies was large to the point they competed with those who attended church as stated in the book *A People and A Nation*:

The U.S. movie industry also took place in this era of prosperity. It began to locate in the Hollywood neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, in the 1920s, and movies became to be a popular obsession. Almost every community now had a theatre in town. In 1922, about million people were going to the theatres each week and that number jumped to about 100 million people by the end of the decade. This number was larger than the number of people that attended church weekly (Norton et al. 213).

Americans considered watching TV's and attending theatres a thing of importance, they included it within the daily program. Movies had changed the cultural patterns of the nation. For instance, movies had played a key role in the shaping of decade's behaviours and especially the women attitudes of the time. The woman who was a good follower of the Victorian ideals of patriarchy was gone for good (Reeves 86).



## **Chapter One: Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression**

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### **1.2.2 Literature of the Twenties**

The 1920's in America were years of energetic state of being, characterized by enormous changes in all the aspects of life. Certainly, literature was not an exception to this change in terms of themes, techniques, and streams. The 1920's is coincided with Literary Modernism as many writers of the time sought to keep pace with the continuously growing modernized society. The writers of the time imbibed with themes of modernism as they experimented with plots, characters and style. The leading men of letters who had written during the World War One also kept on getting inspired from their contexts, such as Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and John Dos Passos and most significantly F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald has put his name on the realistic-modernist canon by producing his novel *The Great Gatsby* that is regarded as the best exemplary novel of the Jazz Age as acclaimed by its readers. The novel is about the wealthy Jay Gatsby who gains his fortune through illegal activities who tries, after a long time of separation, to have back his love old Daisy Buchanan. The novel is a projection of its social context and Fitzgerald's own experience in the lavishness of the decade (Gam 1).

Americans lived an experience of kind during the nineteen twenties, they experienced development in all aspects of life. New inventions shown up that made life easier, the American character came to existence and new styles, themes and streams in literature kicked off the literary traditionalism. At the very end of the decade, a sudden split in New York Stock Exchange ended the show of Roaring and opened another of Depression.

### **1.3. The Great Depression**

The Great Depression was first triggered by the Stock Market Crash of October 24, 1929, that was later known as "The Black Thursday" during which all prices experienced a free fall of unprecedented kind on the New York Stock Exchange, Wall Street. This crash was a sharp turning point for the Americans, as stated by most historians it led to and justified the failure of the banking system as over five thousand banks closed. This failure, however, led to over-productivity; the common American

## **Chapter One: Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression**

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individual wage could not keep pace with the continuous rise in industrial productivity. However, the agricultural decline was a mark and a cause of the depression. The Midwest regions which have always been called the Great Plains had been hit with the sharpest drought ever that gave it the name “the Dust Bowl”<sup>2</sup>. The term refers to the successive series of droughts and the massive dust storms that cross the Midwestern plains, especially those of Oklahoma and Texas. During the depression years, this area is known for its hostile conditions, unfertile soils and strong winds.

The cataclysm was not limitedly occurring on the level of the government and the banks, it extended technically to society. There were noticed profound effects on the American society. Businesses failed and millions of people lost their jobs, homes, farms and savings, besides various sectors were badly damaged mainly agriculture in the Midwest and importation.

As it is described by Szostak Rick “the Great Depression remains the longest, deepest, and most pervasive depression in American history” (44). The Great Depression was, and still is, worst economic crisis in the American history. It lasted from 1929 until the Second World War causing so many changes in the cultural patterns of the country.

### **1.3.1 Social and Cultural Impact of the Time**

More than anything previously experienced, the Great Depression had its profound impacts on the American society and consequently on culture as per normal. The sole prevailing factor behind the new change is the economy. Unemployment drove the American population to deeds that had not gone hand in hand with the American Dream. First, most youth and adolescents were out on road in search of alternative jobs, as stated by Carson and Bonk: “Men wanted to go to work, but plants stood idle. Prolonged unemployment created a new class of people. The jobless sold apples on street corners. They stood in breadlines and outside soup kitchens” (931).

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<sup>2</sup>An area of land where vegetation has been lost and soil reduced to dust and eroded, especially as a consequence of drought or unsuitable farming practice. In the United States the region was the Midwest.

## **Chapter One: Historical Background; Prosperity and Depression**

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The government back then had nothing to do for the financial situation of the nation was beyond control, yet the American population felt and understood the situation, this in turn had done nothing but growing metaphorically the grapes of wrath amongst the people. Besides, westward mass migration to enhance the economic situation had reshaped the American division of population, because the population of the Great Plains moved west to California and Arizona. In his book *The Great Depression: The United States in the Thirties*, Robert Goldston, provides an image about the displaced workers:

Many of them hit the road. Accompanied by families, in broken-down cars or, increasingly, alone, jobless workers roamed from town to town, city to city, state to state, seeking work that was unavailable. The transient knew in his bones that things were no better ahead than they had been behind, but somehow the movement itself seemed positive. It was something, however a hopeless thing, to do (52).

The great majority of the migrants were adolescents seeking opportunity away to supply the family. But for those who could not even migrate, they lived in large tent cities called Hoovervilles<sup>3</sup>. They had two options, either to try the useless search of jobs in the cities, as aforementioned, or to live with a severe sense of despair, but the quest of searching never ended, if one was not searching for a job he must be on the qui vive for any food provided by charities soup kitchen; which was later given the name Hooverstew. Bryn O' Callaghan had illustrated a description of the situation:

You Walk: You get shoved out early: you get your coffee and start walking. A couple of hours before noon you get in line. You eat and start walking. At night, you sleep where you can. You don't talk. You eat what you can. You walk. No one talks to you. You walk. It's cold, and you shiver and stand in doorways or sit in railroad stations. You don't see much. You forget. You walk an hour and forget where you started from. It

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<sup>3</sup>The encampments of the poor and homeless that sprang up during the Great Depression. They were named with ironic intent after President Herbert Hoover, who was in office when the depression started.

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is day. And then it's night, and then it's day again. And you don't remember which was first. You walk (88).

The rapid rise in the crime rate, especially the mid nineteen thirties, was incomparably bigger than that of the Roaring Twenties as many unemployed workers resorted to petty theft just to have food on their tables. As the crisis was sharpening there was some records of armed white men shouting violently that they must have food for themselves and their family without cost (Zinn 363-364). Some young females turned to prostitution as a financial source to cover the familial needs. Not only this but also the suicide, most bankers who had their banking systems down. Fathers of big number of children committed suicide too. Worst still, most of the indebted entrepreneurs committed suicide in large numbers. Studs Terkel in his *Hard Times: an oral history of the Great Depression*, a mid-class suburbanite reports his neighbour's direction reaction to the depression “lotta people committed suicide, pushed themselves out of buildings and killed themselves, ‘cause they couldn’t face the disgrace” (42).

Though the decade was famous for its collective poverty that leads to nothing but malnutrition, health care turned out to be less prior for most Americans, visiting the doctor was reserved only for the direst of cases and only if the price is affordable. Americans sought outlets for escape causing the rates of alcoholism to increase remarkably, but that was not until the 1933 repeal of prohibition took place. As the economic crisis was a bit by bit sharpening the prices of cigarettes that were getting more expensive, smokers switched to cheaper cigarettes. Furthermore, uncontrolled prostitution led to new sorts of diseases among adolescents (ushistory.org).

It all goes without saying that fashion is also to be affected by any social or economic change. The decade has caused the vast majority of women as well as the famous leading fashion models of the time to shift to a new style that, in a way, reflects the time. The woman of the Thirties differed in so many ways from that of the decade before. They opted for a more feminine and practical image than the women of twenties. Skirt lengthened, hair styles turned softer and more graceful (Reeves 124).

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The Great Depression impacts stretched to cause changes in the familial landscape. Houses building slowed down, barely existed. Marriages were delayed which in turn served in spreading more depression and sharp sense of loss among young females. Divorce rates dropped steadily by the running of the years all along the 1930's. Rates of marriage abandonment were continuously on the rise, but for those who were already married, they learned about birth control because the financial situations were not suitable for new born children. Caused by this new way of thinking, the perception of the other sex differed affecting the family as the tide between the two, thus issues such as marriage and the family seemed to be taken more seriously than in the Twenties. These factors led to a fall in birth rates resulting in a creation of new demographic trends that were only seen in the Great Depression era (Reeves 124).

### **1.3.2 The Great Depression Literature**

The great depression was an anxious decade for most Americans, especially those in the Dust Bowl region. It was limitedly associated with unemployment, business and agricultural collapse, and generally distress. Unlike the times the First World War and the Twenties, the US experienced a brand new social context. Intellectuals generally, and writers specifically had experienced social predicaments totally different from their preceding ones. The effects of the depression were prolific in terms of the literary production. Almost all the novels produced during the decade were inspired from the hardships of the Dust Bowl migrants. The clearest instants can be said to be Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, Nelson Algren's *Somebody in Boots*, John Dos Passos' novel *Trilogy U.S.A* and, most certainly, *the Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. The novels were dedicated to defending the proletarian class, the novels of that time did not stand on the line of narration only, but rather they were described as meta-fiction for the implication of portrayal of the voiceless commentaries over class-clashes and the criticism of capitalism. Above all the works aforementioned, *The Grapes of Wrath* and other Dust Bowl's novels served as the most outstanding literary representatives of the epoch.

### **1.4. Conclusion**

The Great Depression was the time during which the United States of America was in its apocalyptic age. The economy was badly damaged, the banking system was totally corrupted and only poor people had to pay for it. Like historical accounts, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* mirrored the American society during the decade of the Depression through description of the landscape, government, people and their attitudes.

**Chapter Two:**  
*The Grapes of Wrath;*  
**a Literary View**

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## **Chapter Two: *The Grapes of Wrath*; a Literary View**

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### **2.1. Introduction**

John Ernest Steinbeck is a famous American writer. He has produced a set of fine novellas along the ten years of the Great Depression. For him, The Great Depression was a sine qua none of his literary prosperity because he published his famous Dustbowl trilogy (*in Dubious Battle, of Mice and Men* and *the Grapes of Wrath*) back then. He is viewed as a controversial writer because his works depict with details the social life of the proletarian class.

### **2.2. John Steinbeck**

Steinbeck's journey of life passed him through many international and national events; the two World Wars, the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. All these events played a key role in the formation the mode Steinbeck wrote.

#### **2.2.1 John Steinbeck's Biography**

John Ernest Steinbeck, Born on February 27th, 1902, in the farming town of Salinas, California, a son of a schoolteacher mother; Olivia Hamilton Steinbeck, and a treasurer of Monterey County. Steinbeck had been passionately brought up in a fertile agricultural valley not so distant from the Pacific coast. He worked at various times as a farm labourer, ranch hand, and factory worker (Steinbeck NP). At the age of 17, he had been to Stanford University, where he has been exposed to literature and writing courses. In Stanford University, he learned a great deal from two significant mentors; Professor Margery Baily and Edith Mirrieless. He soon afterward left the university without even getting a degree yet with a plenty of literary relevance planted in his passionate mind. Repeatedly, Steinbeck showed his grand desires to fulfill a writer's career, so he registered himself only on courses that were fit to his literary aspiration. During the times of his years at Stanford University, Steinbeck used to take a leave of absence, so as to earn money for his scholarship with a multitude of jobs such as store clerk, cotton picker, and ranch hand. The mixture of his experiences at Stanford with his proletarian layer that he grew up within propagated a sense of sympathy that was palpable in the vast majority of his works (Cooke 2).

## **Chapter Two: *The Grapes of Wrath*; a Literary View**

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After leaving Stanford, Steinbeck found himself a job in newspaper reporting in New York City for a short time. Shortly after, he returned to his mother state to develop his craft. In the late 1920s, he wrote the drafts of his first novel *Cup of Gold* (1929). It was there where he and Carol Henning met; a native inhabitant woman who would become later his first wife on January 14, 1930. After their marriage, they settled into the Steinbeck family's summer cottage in Pacific Grove. As time was running by, Steinbeck had been completely settled; he had written in a style that was more naturalistic, inspired from his entourage, far less strained than in his earliest novels. His style had changed his readership, his works turned from being readings of the lower social layers to an interesting fact-depicting literature for the other polite strata. An example of this development is his famous California fiction *To a God Unknown* that reflected the broken dreams and defeats of common people predetermined by the environments they inhabited (Cooke 4).

Steinbeck as a writer had access to the list of the highly-credited writers almost with his first writing; *Cup of Gold*, *To a God Unknown*, *Tortilla Flat*, *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* but his zenith was *the Grapes of Wrath*. After his years of a literary success, John Steinbeck served as a war correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune during the Second World War. Around this same time, he travelled to Mexico to collect marine life with friend Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist (biography.com) who strongly influenced Steinbeck's writing style and content. Steinbeck frequently took small trips with Ricketts along the California coast to give himself time off from his writing. Due to these breaks with Ricketts, Steinbeck learned a great deal. Steinbeck's close relations with Ricketts ended in 1941 when Steinbeck moved away from Pacific Grove and divorced his wife Carol (ibid 5).

During and after the years of the Second World War, Steinbeck had been a literary celebrity. He was to Mexico twice with his best friend Ed Ricketts. The time changed and so did Steinbeck's themes. He produced generally war-related works such as *bombs Away* and *the Moon Is Down* (1942). He followed in 1947 with *The Pearl* what many considered his finest short story and the novel *the Wayward Bus*. The next two years, important events in Steinbeck's life took place. He was elected to

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the American Academy of Arts and Letters and got divorced from his second wife, Gwyn Verdon. The saddest event of the year was the death of his closest friend, Ed Ricketts, in a car crash. In 1950, Steinbeck married Elaine Adneron, she gave him a new mood for keeping on writing his novel *East of Eden* that was published in 1952.

Being a long term heavy smoker, Steinbeck, consequently, died of heart disease at the age of 66 years at his home on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968 (biography.com). He was buried next to his parents and maternal grandparents at the Hamilton family gravesite in Salinas (Benson 197). John Steinbeck's weighty fame came due to his rich literary production. Almost all of his works were of a high value within the western canons.

### **2.2.2 John Steinbeck's Major Works**

John Steinbeck's first novel was *Cup of Gold* (1929) and his notable last was *East of Eden* (1962). The most commonly acknowledged ones were those that dealt with the proletarian layer of the Dust Bowl Region including *in Dubious Battle* (1936), *of Mice and Men* (1937) and most significantly *the Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

#### **2.2.2.1 *Cup of Gold* (1929)**

It was Steinbeck's first novel and the sole work of historical fiction. It was published in 1929; two months prior to the Stock Market Crash. Its publisher was Robert M. McBride and Company. It sold about 1,500 copies, but it was not taken seriously by the few critics who reviewed it (McElrath et al 9), as stated by Lewis Gannett. The knowledge Steinbeck had about his first novel's settings were originated to his readings and never based on actual visits. Thus, *Cup of Gold* was not as weighty as those that were based on the writer's own experiences, places he inhabited and people he shared contexts with.

The novel is a quasi-historical account of the adventures of the seventeenth-century real-life pirate Henry Morgan; an outlaw pirate. He is possessed by two sharp desires: the first is to lustfully have La Santa Roja and the second is to conquer Panama or what is called the Cup of Gold. As a young man, Henry is intrigued by exotic tales of high sea adventures and the legendary men living them. As he matures,

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he gets himself in sailing. He swiftly becomes a fierce and revered commander of his own ship, gaining the admiration and respect of sea-faring men across several continents. He, indeed, pursues what he has been after since his youth days yet, all of a sudden, the world he set out to gain collapses around him. Though he is promoted to great wealth and fame, he, at the very end of it, dies lonely and disillusioned (Heasley 1).

### **2.2.2.2. *To a God Unknown* (1933)**

The short novel was Steinbeck's second written and third published work after the less successful *Cup of Gold*. It was first published by Robert O. Ballou in 1933. It, more than any other work among Steinbeck's, took him the greatest number of years of any of his works to write (Steinbeck NP). Though it was not classified as his best novel, it certainly played a key role in the shaping of the works that followed.

*To a God Unknown* is a mystical tale, exploring one man's attempt to control the forces of nature and, ultimately, to understand the ways of God and the forces of the unconscious within (DeMott 32). It has some features that are essential in the successful works of Steinbeck's career that came later, *the Grapes of Wrath* and *of Mice and Men*, these points in common are the relationship between men and the environment they inhabit especially the agrarian ones.

The story is about the young Joseph Wayn who decides to leave for California from his family farm in Vermont. And when he gets his father's blessing about his decision, he goes to California and successfully sets himself there around an immense oak tree. Shortly after the death of Joseph's father, his three brothers join him and settle next to him, they grow crops and breed animals and all has been going as hoped until the dry season hits their lands. Joseph thinks of the oak tree as being inhabited by his father's soul. He begins to raise a connection of ritual qualities to the tree until his religious brother finds out and kills the tree. Not only this but also, Joseph, thinks of one rock in the region as a sacred one so he gives it an equal attention as that of the tree. The end, however, is a scene of Joseph sacrificing himself by cutting his wrists to water the

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rock with his blood so that it comes back to life. As he lies dying he feels the rains drops against him.

### **2.2.2.3 *In Dubious Battle* (1936)**

*In Dubious Battle* was first published by CoviciFriede in 1936. The novel's first edition contained 270 pages. It was followed by *of Mice and Men* that dealt with almost the same themes in a nearby setting. Steinbeck received serious and positive critical attention and provided the reading public with Steinbeck's foretaste of the philosophical speculations about group behaviour, social inequality, and human rights that were most needed at the time of the Depression. These thoughts were manipulated and developed to themes that, in fact, characterized many of Steinbeck Depression-related well-known works (Heasley 1).

The plot of it was based on some historical events from peach and cotton strikes that were common in California of 1933, especially The Pixley Cotton Strikes; a series of strikes organized by agricultural workers in the state of California in 1933. More than 47,500 workers were involved in the wave of approximately 30 strikes. Twenty-four of the strikes, involving 37,500 union members, were led by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (CAWIU) (2).

The significance of Steinbeck's works lays in the fact that he is a social realist, the works that he inspires from real life events end up to be of a high value. Prior to the publication of *in Dubious Battle*, in a letter John Steinbeck writes:

This is the first time I have felt that I could take the time to write and also that I had anything to say to anything except my manuscript book. You remember that it had an idea that I was going to write the autobiography of a Communist. ... There lay the trouble. I had planned to write a journalistic account of a strike. But as I thought of it as fiction the thing got bigger and bigger. It couldn't be that. I've been living with this thing for some time now. I don't know how much I have got over, but I have used a small strike in an orchard valley as the symbol of man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself. (qtd. Gradesaver).

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Not so different from *the Grapes of Wrath* and *of Mice and Men*, the title of *in Dubious Battle* was taken from another major piece of English poetry, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Innumerable force of Spirits armed,  
That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,  
His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven  
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome (Milton 45).

The story is about a young man Jim Nolan who endures a tough life; poverty, a loss of a sister, an alcoholic abusive father, a deserted mother, and a long period of time behind bars. So, he decides to join a party of Communist qualities where he meets his journey companions Dick, Joy, and Mac. They begin organizing strikes by migrant workers against landowners so that they grant wealth equality and justice for farm workers. The story's end is the protagonist shot and dead, then his body being delivered to the people to see as a motivational act for the people carrying the same goal

### 2.2.2.4 *Of Mice and Men* (1937)

The novella was the first to achieve a remarkable commercial success. It was published on February 25th, 1937, by Covici-Friede. Like *the Grapes of wrath*, *of Mice and Men*'s title was taken from a Scottish poet Robert Burns' work: *to a Mouse*:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley, (Burns 68).

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*Of Mice and Men* tells the story of George Milton and Lennie Small, two displaced migrant farm workers, who were in search of work in ranches until they find a job in one of Salinas Valley farms. Though they're different in their attitudes and behaviours, they both have the same goal in common, which is to have some lands of their own where they can breed animals. Yet, the course of events taking place along the novella is totally out of what has been planned. The two friends have unintentional troubles that end up with murder and escape. At the end of its publication year, it has been adapted to for the Broadway Stage, and it opened at the Music Box Theatre Music Box Theatre: a Broadway Theatre located at 239 West 45th Street (George Abbott Way) in Midtown Manhattan. It opened in 1921 and hosted a new musical production every year until 1925, when it presented its first play in New York on November 23th, 1937. The play was also a huge success to the point that it won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award: any of several awards given each year by New York Theatre critics (newspaper and magazine writers who give their opinions about plays performed) in 1937 (Hayashi 117).

On the international scale, *of Mice and Men* was listed the 52<sup>nd</sup> among the nation's best-loved novels on the BBC's, April 2003 survey, The Big Read. Ever since its publication, Steinbeck gained a national recognition.

### **2.2.2.5 *East of Eden* (1962)**

As aforementioned, Steinbeck's crucial steps of writing *East of Eden* were during the very first years of his third marriage. His research for the novel began in 1948, he was on and off for California for writing materials and studying carefully the archives of his village of birth's newspaper; Salinas Index-Journal (Heasley 2) so that he adds an insightfully authentic quality to it and never missed trace of details taking place in the lives of his people. Then the composting phase that took place in January 1951 until he finished the draft was out together on November of 1951. And it was finally published in September of 1952 by Viking Press.

The main theme propagated in the pages of the novel is the struggles between good and evil, Heaven and Hell, right and wrong, and truth and lie, quintessential struggles that have characterized human existence since the beginning of time.

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The story runs around the Hamiltons, the Trasks, and in the late parts of the story, the Ames. Cal Trask is the protagonist of the novel. Cal Trask is the son of Adam Trask and the brother of Aron. The novel, like *the Grapes of Wrath*, starts with a description of the land and the people. Then it gives an overview of the families, as being migrants who settle after long-term farm labour. Adam Trask gets married to Cathy, then they together move to California. She gives him birth to twin brothers. Cathy shoots Adam and leaves to go run a brothel. Cathy is a young woman from Massachusetts, who is described as vindictively devious. In her very first teenage years, Cathy learns how to make use of her sense of sexuality to manipulate men. Worse yet, Cathy sets the fire in her parents' house while they were there.

The story isn't about Cathy solely as being the projection of the evil, hell, bad, and wrong, other events also reflect the human demonic side such as Aron and Cal's relationship among themselves and with their father, Aron being killed in battle and the battle itself.

John Steinbeck considers *East of Eden* to be his ultimate masterpiece. It, hand in hand with *the Grapes of Wrath*, helps him win the Nobel Prize. He has dedicated the novel for merely his sons so they can get better to understand their family history and Steinbeck's background as shaping California's agricultural Salinas Valley (Heasley 1).

### **2.3. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)**

Steinbeck's career for the San Francisco News turned out to have been fruitful not only in terms of salary but also it helped in the creation of his best work, *the Grapes of Wrath*. Prior to the novel's writing, Steinbeck was thinking of a "big book". He made trips from his Bay Area home to Southern California to visit the Arvin Sanitary Camp was more commonly called Weedpatch (19Dourgarian). Steinbeck was studying and watching carefully the lives of migrant workers in the camps. The trips resulted in a series of seven essays entitled *the Harvest Gypsies* that was published by the San Francisco News in October 1936 (nationalgeographic.com), the essays later were gathered in one pamphlet entitled *Their Blood was Strong*. The pamphlet coupled with the articles were the seeds from which *the Grapes of Wrath* blossomed.



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Agreeably, John Steinbeck's best work is *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was published in 1930 by Viking, the first edition contained 464 pages. It depicted with details the problems and hardships of migrant workers encountered while travelling from Oklahoma to and in California. It won a great deal of critical praises by many critics as a masterpiece, but was criticized by others for its sentimentality and lack of complexity. Though it was not that welcome by scholars and politicians, nevertheless, the novel continued to sell well (about 200,000 copies a year by some estimates), and it had been estimated to have been translated into between 40 and 60 languages (Galati 5).

The titles of almost all of Steinbeck's works were a mere reflection of his rich literary grounds. The title of the novel was taken from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* written by an abolitionist Julia Ward Howe in 1861.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;

His truth is marching on (23).

Steinbeck was careful in putting the title. He illustrated the plights of the Joads and the rest of the other Oklahoman migrant families as they were forced to move westwards to California in search of farming jobs. Grapes are a common crop in California and are probably what many of the poor farmers like the Joads pick during their times in California. The phrase "grapes of wrath" works on several levels, for instance, the migrant farming families were literally picking grapes in a wrathful mood (Nichter 2).

The novel's events run about the fictional Joad Family who are dispossessed for their own land by the banking system. They later think, like many other Oklahoman families, to move westward to California for work opportunities. Tom Joad is the central character yet all the rest of the characters are essential as well.

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*The Grapes of Wrath* is a novel that is rich of themes. In most literary dictionaries, the term “theme” is defined as the main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work that is stated directly or indirectly. If one takes the novel in its context and tends to pick the themes accordingly, the results are going to be themes of industrialization, man’s love of the land, dehumanization, poverty, hope, collectivity and sense of the group. First, industrialization in the novel is depicted negatively through the tractors that replace the manual labour on the farming land. It is also the main cause behind the displacement of many Oklahoman farmers. Second, man’s love of the land is probably the main reason why most Oklahoman farmers leave their lands in search of work in other lands to gain lands by time. That’s why the land is used as a definition, past, future and identity of the Oklahoman character. This love of land is destructed by the heartless tractors which cut the farmers’ connection to the land (Heasley 1). Third, dehumanization provokes Steinbeck’s sympathy since his very first commitments with the San Francisco News. This theme is major because it is apparent from the very events in the plot until the last one, especially in the treatment of the police on the road, the camps and against strikes. Life in camps and work conditions are marks of the collapse of the human dignity. The novel’s tone is mournful, awed, enraged, and sympathetic. The narrator is a non-character yet omniscient, historically aware, with deeply sympathetic consciousness over the characters and the vents they come across. Last but not least, Steinbeck propagates the idea of the collective experience. He has been often criticized for being pro-communist. In *the Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck clearly shows to what extent one can survive amongst his group starting from the Joads, the Wilsons, and the Okies in the camps to the striking workers on the streets.

### **2.3.1 Synopsis of *the Grapes of Wrath***

The story begins with a description of destroyed crops in the farming Oklahoma. The writer continues describing the setting until Tom Joad, the protagonist, shows up walking all the way up home. Tom is on parole after serving four years in McAlester prison for a murder charge. Tom meets Jim Casey, he invites her to accompany him to his family’s home. As they were walking and talking, Casey

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reveals his loss of faith and doubts over the pre-established religious teachings to Tom and that he is not a preacher anymore. As Tom's family house is in sight, Tom notices that the house is deserted. The writer turns to inner description of Tom. Tom sadly begins to wonder about his family's whereabouts, about the deserted lands, the shattered corps, and the yellow tint to the grown. From that unpleasing atmosphere and Tom's state of being, the Joads' former neighbour Muley Graves comes out and informs Tom that his family gets dispossessed from their ownings and moves to his uncle John's home and are about to go west to California like most of the farming families in Oklahoma.

Tom and Jim head to the house of Tom's uncle. He finds out that his family have sold almost all the things they could and left the ones that they need in their journey west to California. Tom, with no second thought decides to accompany his family westwards although his parole confines him within the borders of Oklahoma. As they have been in the finishing touches of leaving, Grampa refuses to abandon his ancestral home so the family agrees to sedate him out so that they can carry him along without he knows about it.

Like all the westward migrants, the Joads begin to experience some hardships on their journey along Route 66. They first lose the family dog. The night of their departure day they have to spend the night along the roadside with other families where they meet the Wilsons and are friends with one another. The true hardship that the Joads live is when Grampa dies after going through a severe stroke. Thus, he is buried along the roadside. Then the two families move on, after a few more miles, the Wilson's car breaks down, luckily Tom and Al have an experience with fixing car engines. When the Wilsons' car breaks down once again, Tom, Al and Casey remain behind to repair the car and the rest move on westwards. After finding the needed spare piece for the Wilsons' car, Tom and Al return from the junkyard to the car.

The Joads find a temporal dwelling at one of the roadside camps. Contrary to their hopes of getting jobs, they begin to hear foreboding stories about the working conditions and the lack of jobs in California. A man returning from California heading

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back to Oklahoma tells the families about his tragedy, how his wife and child die of starvation. The man insists that the promises of work in the flyers are a fraud and that 20,000 men showed up while the real needed number of workers is 800, so it is not worth losing effort to keep up the way westwards.

The quest continues but not the unity of the Joads. Noah, the Joads' oldest child and Connie, the husband of Rose of Sharon the Joads' oldest and pregnant daughter collapse and forsakes the group not only within the family, but also the Wilsons too. They decide to remain behind as the wife; Sairy Wilson, is too sick to move on. After crossing the Colorado River, the Joads are stopped by the police. Ma Joad uses a technique of begging-like to make the police let them pass without inspection saying that that they have an old sick lady with them. She does that to hide the fact that Granma Joad is indeed dead.

Joads keep on until they settle on one of the Hoovervilles where they stayed searching for jobs. The experience in Hoovervilles campsites has not been that pleasing, there has been continuous aggression among the desperate migrants, sick old people and hungry parents. Ma has been always surrounded with naughty hungry kids while she cooks for her family. Like all Oklahoman people, the Joads have been annoyed to from the disdainful label the "Okies" associated to them by the people of California. But this has not been until they move to Weedpatch camp, a government camp for migrants where no police officers disturbing residents from time to time, there are also baths, toilets, running waters and music each Sunday.

Like usual, quarrels always take place in camps between police men and migrants. Now, as Tom and some migrant are negotiating wages with the contractors, a Deputy Sheriff tries to arrest one of the men but Tom intervenes. When the fight sharpens, Tom strikes him and then Casey knocks down the Sheriff unconsciously. Casey has been there for the police to arrest him instead of Tom so that he will not be sent back to jail for violating the parole.

During their stay time in Weedpatch, Tom, eventually, finds the family a pipe-laying job for a couple of days. Tom learns from his employer, Mr. Thomas that there

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are some plans to disrupt the camp's Saturday night dance so that the police would have a pretext to shut-down the facility. The family spends one month in Weedpatch with no stable. Then, they move to Hooper Ranch, where they pick peaches for high wages.

At the meantime, several migrant farm workers run strikes. Later Tom finds out that one of the significant leaders is Casey. With no second thought, Tom joins Casey in organizing strikes. Days go by Tom and Casey are reinforced with several working men have been on a fight with strike breakers. The fight ends up with one of breakers murdering Casey with a pick handle. Tom angrily avenges Casey's death by killing his murderer.

Hoping to keep the family out of his troubles, Tom decides to find himself another place to work in. Yet, Ma gives her alternative idea of leaving the Hooper Ranch to a cotton field northwards. Hitherto, nothing is known about Tom's identity, while the family works at day time and rests in the boxcar where Tom hides in the woods nearby. All has been discreetly going well until Ruthie Winfield, Tom's youngest sister, blows everything off and tells another girl about Tom. When Ma knows about it immediately informs Tom. He decides to leave the family and find refuge elsewhere, and he tells Ma of his sudden intentions to resume the dream Casey has lost his life for.

The story approaches its end with the family having been working together without Tom for days during the season of rain. One rainy day on the camp, the Joads family have been struggling with the flooding instead of leaving because they have to stay for the pregnant Rose of Sharon suddenly falls into labour. When she successfully gives birth to the child, they move to barn inside which they meet a starving old man with a young boy. To bring the old man back to life, Rose of Sharon breastfeeds the dying man.

### **2.3.2 Motifs and Symbols in *the Grapes of Wrath***

*The Grapes of Wrath* quality requires John Steinbeck to use many motifs and

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symbols to fulfill his meta-fictional aims.

### **2.3.2.1 Motifs**

To have the reader attached to the novel, Steinbeck varied his motifs. The main motifs are leadership and unity; leadership in *the Grapes of Wrath* is between ups and downs. Readers would never expect what is going to happen to who is leading now and who is to lead later on. Second, the vents of the story are not the kind of events that keep the disparate farming migrants with their beloved ones. Nevertheless, unity is a major motif.

#### **2.3.2.1.1 Leadership**

In the novel, the Joads are a traditional nuclear family led by the oldest men; Grampa, even though he grows old for that kind of jobs. But by the running of the events, things seem to have taken another course. Grampa Joad loses his value as the head of all the Joads when the family sedate him and manipulate him to have him on road with them. After Grampa's death, it is obligatory that Pa is the one to take over after him, yet all the members of the Joads, and reader as well, know that he is not fit to do the leading job, he even could lead the family to separation or more hardships. Ma is the remaining suitable option, she takes control as the matriarch instead of the patriarch. She takes control over the family. Pa, on his part, could not easily adjust to the new system, so he threatens Ma of beating.

Furthermore, the shift of the leadership is not the central concept of the novel, yet it keeps readers attached to the upcoming rest of events. This gradual change of roles parallels with the change occurring in the government camp, Weedpatch, where residents create their own rules instead of being watched over by the traditional leaderships of the governmental laws (Majoric 15).

#### **2.3.2.1.2 Unity**

Probably, the term unity brings to the mind the image of Ma Joad because, throughout the novel, she insists that the family should remain as one block to

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guarantee its strength and continuity, especially after Connie and Noah break away from the family block. Ma makes sure that all the members including Jim Casey remain together in their hours of the greatest plight. Ma's reaction to some events such as the breakdown of the Wilsons' car and Tom's murder of the men who murdered Casey provoke the comfort Ma bears towards familial unity. Not only this but unity is also noticed when the migrant farmers in the camp united with one another to keep the police and their made-up troubles away (Nichter 1).

### **2.3.2.2 Symbols**

Though *the Grapes of Wrath* is classified amongst the realistic novels of the American literature, be that as it may, John Steinbeck used a set of symbols of a romantic quality. These symbols were animals, each animal has a symbolic function that helps in the understanding of the plot line. Another Symbol was the state of being of Rose of Sharon.

#### **2.3.2.2.1 Animals**

There are a common symbols of certain animals, dogs for instance symbolize loyalty and turtles symbolize slowness. in the *Grapes of Wrath*, these two animals were used differently.

##### **2.3.2.2.1.1 The Dog of the Joads**

In their very early times in travelling to California, the Joads meet an event that is not paramount in the course of the novel's events, yet it is an important symbol that provides readers with an idea about the events to come. The action is the killing of the Joads' dog by speeding car on the road at the time they are pausing for gas. This is the start (a foreshadowing) of all the problems the Joads and other migrant Oklahoman families will encounter during their adventure westwards (Majoric18).

##### **2.3.2.2.1.2 The Turtle**

In the third chapter of *the Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck gives a description of a

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turtle on the road. The turtle is a clear marker of the powerless farming migrant. The fast driving car unwillingly hits the turtle and turns it upside down. After a long struggle, the turtle works its way back on its feet and continues on its way. Apparently, this, in many ways, mirrors the migrants. Like the Joads, the turtle slowly struggles its way on the road westwards, seeking a better environment. Furthermore, its slow movement is the same with the pace of the Joads truck. The turtle and the dog serve as an excellent projection of the Joads specifically and migrants generally, who are unfortunately struggling on their way to and in the promised west (Majoric 22).

### **2.3.2.2 Rose of Sharon's Pregnancy**

The Joads are American traditional family in terms of structure, thus it is not surprising to have Rose of Sharon as a married pregnant daughter. In the novel, Rose of Sharon is not created by Steinbeck to show that she is a member of a traditional American family; he, rather, makes use of her qualities, such as pregnancy to symbolize important themes that construct his novel and give it its high value.

Rose of Sharon's pregnancy symbolizes in many ways the hope for the Joad family. Pregnancy usually ends up with a new born kid that is in all cases a angelic creature that is passionately waited for. The Joads search of work is thought to end up the same way pregnancies usually do (Nichter 1). At the ending chapters of the novel, Rose of Sharon gives birth to a dead kid, who in fact represents the broken hopes of the Joads. Yet the family moves on with the same degree of hope.

### **Conclusion**

John Steinbeck's life experiences had a great impact on the shaping of his style of authoring. Growing in an agrarian space and having had to work during studies times, he grew up with a sympathetic sentiment towards the working layer. His Dust Bowl trilogy reflected the hardships of the defeated migrant farming families he had witnessed in the camps during his years working for the San Francisco News. *The Grapes of Wrath*, however, is the richest and the greatest among its category because if it is analyzed from an angle that is deeper than the standard literary analysis, one



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can clearly grasp the social, economic, political, spiritual, and philosophical aspects that won it its significance.

**Chapter Three:**  
*The Grapes of Wrath;*  
**a Portrayal of the**  
**American Society**

## Outline of Chapter Three

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## **Chapter Three: *The Grapes of Wrath*; Portrayal of the American Society**

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### **3.1. Introduction**

Like all the masterpieces of the western literature, the analysis of *the Grapes of Wrath* can result in different interpretations and distinct results for it has proved to be a canonical work that accurately relates to history. Steinbeck sets his themes on both individual and social levels. Additionally, his epic masterpiece implicitly reflects the ideals that are seminal during the Great Depression. As the central issue addressed in *the Grapes of Wrath* is hardships of migrant families during the Great Depression, Steinbeck designs the characters' development of roles to showcase the shift from patriarchy to matriarchy that characterized the American family as a basic entity.

### **3.2. American Social Ethos in the Grapes of Wrath**

Through the novel *the Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck uses a set of themes, some of them are managed on an individual level such as these of Ma Joad, Jim Casey and Muley Graves, meanwhile there are other set of ethos that are put on a larger level; the social level, to fulfill the collective sense promotion intended by Steinbeck. These themes include hope, class clashes, family importance, and poverty. The function of the social themes is that they mirror the group, rather than the individual, and their attitudes during the years of the Great Depression.

#### **3.2.1 American Hope**

The novel *the Grapes of Wrath* was written in 1933 when the Great Depression in America was at its very apex. The title per se was couched in a wrathful feelings, thus it was quite natural that readers of the novel would expect desperation, hope and therefore a solution. To depict the hopes that were held by the Oklahoman migrant farmers of the Depression time, Steinbeck created a strong thread of hope that lasted until the end of the novel through many characters and behaviors. The first and deepest sign of hope was in the very first pages, when Tom came out of jail on a parole, it was a mark that he has got the chance to start it all over. Additionally, Tom Joad was supposed to have spent seven years behind bars but since he was behaving

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well in prison he was released on four years. "I got seven years, account of he had a knife in me. Got out in four—parole." (Steinbeck 15).

When Tom Joad finally joins his family, he discovers that his sister, Rose of Sharon, is married to Connie Rivers, a nineteen-year old mannered guy. And Rose of Sharon is pregnant. Rose of Sharon's pregnancy represents a new beginning that is to come soon among all the ruins that have been dominant, because Rose of Sharon and her baby are in the centre of the family. An instance case from the novel is: "The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the centre of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the centre of it with Connie making a small orbit about her (83)."

On a larger level, hope in *the Grapes of Wrath* is the whole energy. The Joad family like the rest of the families from Oklahoma moves west to California for they have seen a better life and promising conditions. The decision for leaving westwards to California was fueled at first by the handbill demanding farming workers to do the picking on the seasons of fruits.

Steinbeck shows the importance of the hope of Oklahoman farmers held for California, that hope is the basis of the journey to the promised west:

And the tenant men came walking back, hands in their pockets, hats pulled down. Some bought a pint and drank it fast to make the impact hard and stunning. But they didn't laugh and they didn't dance. They didn't sing or pick the guitars. They walked back to the farms, hands in pockets and heads down, shoes kicking the red dust up. Maybe we can start again, in the new rich land—in California, where the fruit grows. We'll start over (55).

Among the Joads themselves, there is a good thought about how life would be in California. Ma shows to the family her relieving instincts about their life in the west:

That's a good way... Yes, that's a good way. But I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place, an'

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people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder—that is, if we all get jobs an' all work—maybe we can get one of them little white houses (Steinbeck 59).

Shortly afterwards, on a campsite on their road westwards, Pa Joad tells the fellow migrant residents of the camp that he is well over his loss of land and home, since he is to have better one in California. "Lucky for us it ain't gonna las' long," said Pa. "We'll get out west an' we'll get work an' we'll get a piece a growin' land with water"(125).

Hope during the Great Depression was the main reason that people fought and came over the undesirable obstacles and remained united. Through *the Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck, more than any author of the time, vividly presented the hopes of the proletarian class that led them to whatever they were.

### **3.2.2 American Class Clashes**

*The Grapes of Wrath* has won its respectful epithets and placement within the finest proletarian novels in the American literary canon. Proletarian novel is a genre of realistic novels dedicated to the working class and the social or the industrial and socioeconomic problems they endure. The proletarian novel is called as such for it is clearly siding with the working class. Sociologically speaking, society according to Karl Marx is divided into two main different divisions: the bourgeois and the proletarians. The two groups can never get along, because they have an economic gap between them and therefore an ideological one. Characters in *the Grapes of Wrath* are divided into two different groups just like the division Karl Marx has suggested.

After his solid observations on the American life during the thirties, John Steinbeck makes the bourgeois appear throughout the novel in the form of the bank's envoys and later on they are depicted through the farm employers of California. On the other hand, the proletarian class is represented through the Joad family and the rest of the migrants in both Oklahoma and California.

The very first signs in *the Grapes of Wrath* that reflect the gap that was lucid in

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the American society is when farmers of Oklahoma are obliged to move to California in search for a better life conditions. Later on, the clash of the social classes sharpens when the landowners of California use the migrants as cheap source of labour and an available means to increase their own profit.

When Tom Joad has been in the first camp around the Road 66, he starts a conversation with one man who has been in California. As the conversation goes by about some conditions back in Oklahoma and the Midwest and how they are to be in California as well, the man explains how things are to go with them because since they belong to the same region and class, they are consequently going to pass through the same discrimination. The man questions Tom whether he has ever been addressed as an Okie or not. The term Okie is a local Californian slang word used to refer to the poor migrant farmers coming from the agrarian Midwest states, mainly Oklahoma and other states such as Arkansas, Kansas and Texas. The word Okie is used in an offensive manner that is as distancing as the term Nigro as reference to the African Americans. Oklahomans are thought to be dangerous and threatening to the Californian integrity and peace and it is for the good of the indigenous people if migrants are to be overwhelmed. The status quo is lively depicted in *the Grapes of Wrath*: "Got to keep 'em in line or Christ only knows what they'll do! Why, Jesus, they're as dangerous as niggers in the South! If they ever gettogether there ain't nothin' that'll stop 'em" (Steinbeck 158). In a clearer image, Steinbeck stresses the facts that the desperate migrants are discriminated, he writes through the man who talks to Tom Joad about Californian landowners:

"They gonna look at you an' their face says, 'I don't like you, you son-of-a-bitch.' Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside, an' they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's face how they hate you... They hate you 'cause they're scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody' gonna take it... You never been called 'Okie' yet." Tom said, "Okie? What's that?" "Well, Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty sonof-a-bitch.

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Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it. But I can't tell you nothin'. You got to go there (Steinbeck 137)

Furthermore, in their first hitting of the Californian lands, the Joads as a representative of the migrants from the Midwest have been through a sharp degradation by the peoples of California. Ma Joad tells her son Tom how the policeman called her with the hideously derogatory term Okie: "Ma hesitated a long time. "Tom, this here policeman—he called us—Okies. He says, 'We don' want you goddamn Okies settlin' down... says he's gonna run us in if we're here tomorra"(144). The previous quote strongly mirrors the fact that there is indeed a class division and therefore a clash. Not only do the peoples of California hate the migrants coming from the agrarian states and call them Okies, but they also give other various derogatory terms. "These goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate, sexual maniacs. Those goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights" (144).

As aforementioned, Karl Marx convincingly argues that people belonging to different group in terms of financial capacities might not get to integrate with one another successfully. Steinbeck as a proletarian novelist has been clearly in favour of the proletarian class. The omniscient unknown narrator of *the Grapes of wrath* tells that the state of being of the migrant is indeed shaped by the external factors that have gone beyond the understanding, capacity and control of the Oklahoman migrants:

... and then suddenly the machines pushed them out and they swarmed on the highways. The movement changed them; the highways, the camps along the road, the fear of hunger and the hunger itself, changed them. The children without dinner changed them, the endless moving changed them. They were migrants. And the hostility changed them, welded them, united them—hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shotguns, guarding the world against their own people (Steinbeck 190).



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To give a clearer image about the wide gap that exists in the American so-called society of equality, Steinbeck describes not only the poverty of the proletarian class, but he has also fueled a description of the rich land owners to show the contrast:

In the West there was panic when the migrants multiplied on the highways. Men of property were terrified for their property. Men who had never been hungry saw the eyes of the hungry. Men who had never wanted anything very much saw the flare of want in the eyes of the migrants. And the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad (190).

In a nutshell, poor farmers travel from their inherited home to a place they have never been to, searching for better life. Suddenly and unexpectedly, they have endured a sharp inequality, injustice and discrimination, despite the fact that in the American society pursuit of happiness is thought to be a natural right that should be crowned with success at the end of it.

### **3.3. American Social Philosophies in *the Grapes of Wrath***

Most of Steinbeck's novels have a philosophical side and *the Grapes of Wrath* is no exception to this fact. Though it has a clear and stable narrative chronology, *the Grapes of Wrath* contains a set of varied philosophies, the most dominant ones are Transcendentalism, Social Darwinism and Anti-Capitalism.

#### **3.3.1 American Transcendentalism**

Transcendentalism is a philosophical and literary movement. It is a subdivision within the Romantic Movement. The philosophy is the seminal voice of American society in the nineteenth-century. The leading figures of the movements are critics against the contemporary society that is a breed of the already established ideals of conformity to the Unitarian church and law. Transcendentalist philosophy urges individuals to seek universal truths depending on their insights. The movement stresses nature and its necessary relationship to man.

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### 3.3.1.1 American Self-Reliance

One cannot simply read about Transcendentalism without having a thorough knowledge about self-reliance as a major tenet of the philosophy set first by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson dedicatessome whole essays just to stress the essence of relying on one's self to get access to the needed amount of truth. In his essay *Self-Reliance*, Emerson writes:“absolve you to yourself”, and he adds “and you shall have the suffrage of the world” (3).

In *the Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck propagates the idea of self-reliance through the character Jim Caesy. Self-reliance in the transcendental context does not mean the negative sense of individuality nor the destructiveselfishness; it rather means the act of following one's mind that is thought to result in the right choices in life.

In this respect, Jim Casey escapes his society for a period as good as four years. Casey, after a long term meditation and questioning about the validity of his cause as a preacher, he gives up all his Christian former grounds and beliefs. After he is convinced that it is not about the God one worships or the religion one preaches, it is rather about one's own self to rely on and connection to other people, he tells Tom Joad that the way he is now is a result of his reliance on himself as a source of knowledge and as a director of himself. By exemplification, Casey says:

I figgered about the Holy Sperit and the Jesus road. I figgered, 'Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus?... maybe that's the Holy Sperit—the human sperit—' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a suddent—I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it (Steinbeck 15).

the previous quotation shows the effects total self-reliance and direct retrieval from society had on Jim Casey's formulation ideas.

### 3.3.1.2 Americans and Nature

One of the central elements in the transcendental philosophy is nature. Nature has been given a vivid concern by the head-transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau as well. In his essay entitled *Nature*, Emerson argues that man has a stronger relationship with nature more than he thinks, not only those benefits of plantations but additionally one gets to gain an individual and universal understanding through nature.

Steinbeck makes of his novel *the Grapes of Wrath* as a means to depict the sanctity of nature in the American mind during the nineteen thirties that he found in himself and in the migrants of the Midwest he has been with. This by virtue of the fact that Steinbeck himself has been brought up living and working in the fertile Salinas valley where all men have had strong ancestral ties with the land. His main characters are Oklahoman fugitive farming families whose actions are almost guided by their relationship to nature.

The Oklahoman farmers are described by Steinbeck as having a solid attachment to the land, for they have been there since the very first years of the settlement and that it has been passed on from generation to another. In the novel, when one farmer is obliged to move out of his land, he rejects the fact of being dispossessed showing the emotional link with his land, a link that is not made upon some sort of document. In this vein, he declares “but it's our land.” We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours (Steinbeck 21). In this dialogue, Steinbeck is showing how deep the tie between the farmer and land is, the land that is not generous anymore.

After being sent off their homeland, the farmers of Oklahoma decide to move to California, because there are offers of jobs in farms as told in the handbill being distributed. They could have moved to other nearby states where they can work in factories, restaurants or other institutions belonging to the government or to private sectors. On a description of Ma Joad's speculation about California, she begins with a description to the climate and the crops: “I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe,

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in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place" (Steinbeck 59). She did not describe the infrastructure or other aspects of the state.

By the running of the course of events, Steinbeck reflects the love of nature Americans bear through an expression of Pa Joad's feeling about cotton picking: "By God, I'd like to get my hands on some cotton! There's work I un'erstan" (276). Still, Tom Joad is also used to reflect the love of all what goes with the land. In the middle of a sweaty tiresome frame-work, Tom shows satisfaction

Tom laughed. "Me too, I guess." His pick arced up and drove down, and the earth cracked under it. The sweat rolled down his forehead and down the sides of his nose, and it glistened on his neck. "Damn it," he said, "a pick is a nice tool (umph), if you don' fight it (umph). You an' the pick (umph) workin' together (umph) (201).

People usually is a escape to nature to meditate or to relief. but for Oklahoman migrant farmers is not the case, they saw nature as a part of their being, Tom Joads 's reaction over finally having his farming tool in his hand.

### **3.3.1.3 American Non-conformity**

In its very broad sense, disobedience is the act of refusing to obey or neglecting the instruction. However, in the transcendental terms, it is often associated with Civil disobedience. The term is coined by Henry David Thoreau when he first publishes his essay under the title of *Civil Disobedience*. In the essay, Thoreau stresses the idea that citizens should never leave the space for the government to overrule or dictate one's actions, and if it ever does, one should face it with a clear disobedience. In his *Civil Disobedience*, Henry David Thoreau writes: "It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have the right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right...law never made men a whit more just (2).

Disobedience is an essential element expressed by John Steinbeck throughout the characters and their behaviours in the *Grapes of Wrath*. The first aggressive action

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and resisting reaction in the novel is when the bank's envoys come to the farms to repossess them. On their part, farmers, believing in their natural rights to the land, disobey the envoys regardless of the fact that they are all legalized. After an impolite attempt to dispossess the farmers from the land with the help of the tractor, one farmer responds were rigid as he refused to forfeit the land he is born on. Thus, the respond of the bank workers, however, remains determined and growing drier. "You'll have to go... No. The bank, the monster owns it. You'll have to go" (Steinbeck 21). As the farmers are convinced that the talking would not result in a way that serves them, they manage to show a disobedient spirit hoping that they remain in possession of the land that belongs to them by natural right. Back to the novel, the farmer declares: "Grampa killed Indians, pa killed snakes for the land. Maybe we can kill banks-they 're worse than Indians and snakes. Maybe we got to fight to keep our land like pa and Grampa did"(21). This quote marks the first and direct declaration of armed resistance of the peasants that revolute to stay in the ancestral land.

Shortly after in the novel, driver takes tractor straight ahead towards the house that is in the farm. Few moments before the destruction, the tenant man yelled in a tone full of wrath

I built it with my hands. Straightened old nails to put the sheathing on. Rafters are wired to the stringers with baling wire. It's mine. I built it. You bump it down—I'll be in the window with a rifle. You even come too close and I'll pot you like a rabbit (Steinbeck 24).

Steinbeck in this very sentence expresses the readiness of the Oklahoman farmers to kill Oklahoman workers who are working for the government's bank just to keep what belong to them.

### **3.3.2 Social Darwinism**

Social Darwinism can be defined differently and categorized at many levels; sociological theory, world view or a literary theme. Social Darwinism is a major sociological theory in the late nineteenth-century and the early twentieth Century in

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the United States. It is originated from Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection and later Herbert Spencer's sociological theories to justify imperialism, racism, and laissez-faire socio-economic policies. Social Darwinists suggest equality between individuals in society and plants and animals in nature. They argue that both elements being compared competed against one another for success and survival.

In the novel *the Grapes of Wrath*, the matters of struggle for and survival seeking are quite the most dominant. In the very first chapters, Oklahoman farmers seem to stand and resist the tractors and bankers so that they remain in possession of the lands they live in. Bankers, on their part, keep up their strong position by the help of the tractors and documents from the government.

In the following chapters of *the Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck consistently clarifies that the Oklahoman migrant farmers' hardships are not mainly caused by the severe drought that drives them to hostile California, but it is humans who cause them this suffering. Like suggested by Social Darwinists, humans like plants and animals in nature all compete for survival, even if it costs the lives of the opponent. Landowners of California do not seem to care about those who are dying of hunger and sickness on the ranches gateways, all they care about is maintaining their privileged status for landowners' properties which is much more paramount than other people's lives. They are making use of Oklahoman farming migrants, who are thought to be socially unfit, to serve them as they believe themselves to be the best adapted.

### **3.3.3 American Anti-Capitalism**

In his epic novel *the Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck provides a great deal of signs that would lead the reader to think in a way that there is anti-capitalist sentiment in the minds of people along the years of the Great Depression, if not a mere Communist or both. Steinbeck in some events addresses the institutions of the government as irrelevant and sometimes he shows the fruitfulness of the Communist-like objects and actions.

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The first clear depiction of the anti-Capitalist sentiment is in chapter five when he describes the wrath and the perplexity caused to poor farmers by capitalism. Readers would feel every single detail of the farmers' situation when they have been put in a situation when they cannot defend their ancestral lands against the banks' envoys. "We're sorry. It's not us. It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man...The bank is something else than men" (Steinbeck 39). Steinbeck, afterwards, portrays the bank and its envoys as completely negative. He shows that the evil deeds by the envoys are Capitalist-based. They come to take the land and blame "the monster," instead of providing help, he writes "It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it... It's the monster. Men made it, but can't control it" (40).

Moreover, Steinbeck shows how people (the Joads) feel relieved in the Communist-like camps that belong to the government. They find conditions that are fit to their exhaustion. They get to use washing tubs, baths, toilets and running water and the needed decent life conditions.

Another thing that is pleasing for the Oklahoman migrant farmers is that they will not get bothered by policemen. Policemen are depicted as a non-serving institution for the needy people as they are supposed to do, as Steinbeck describes their action against the Joads on road. "Ma hesitated a long time. "Tom, this here policeman—he called us—Okies. He says, 'We don' want you goddamn Okies settlin' down... says he's gonna run us in if we're here tomorra" (144). Moreover, Through Jim Caesy Steinbeck writes "I tol' you. Cops cause more trouble than they stop"(Steinbeck 263). Police are also depicted as to be feared by innocent people, this is expressed when the watchman of the camp explains how things are in the camp to Tom and the other Joad's members who seek to know what rights policemen have against migrant workers. "Tom's eyes drew down. "Cops?" he asked. The watchman laughed. "No cops. We got our own cops. Folks here elect their own cops. Come along." ... "Yeah," said Tom" (191). During the Great Depression, and especially for the proletarian class, pleasing events do not happen quite often. that is why the previous quotation will seem like the happiest in the quest of the Joad family in California.

### 3.4. Family Structure in *the Grapes of Wrath* between patriarchy and matriarchy

For the migration towards the west is not done by individuals but rather by families, Steinbeck makes of the Joad members and the families they get acquainted to on their way as his central characters. In *the Grapes of Wrath*, both of the Joads and the rest of the families are used to depict the structure of the family in the United States during the decade of the Great Depression.

Steinbeck's description of families' attitudes and reactions reflects that all the families are run by the old patriarchal mode, but this is not until men, affected by the new conditions they come through, give up most of their patriarchy and rely on wives and children.

Earlier in the novel, family structure seems to be totally dependent of man's moods, be it a husband, father or a grandfather. In the description of the dust-covered crops and how the crops are dying out gradually, Steinbeck describes men and their families as they stand powerlessly and watch. In this description, one gets to realize that the American family is still run by men. Not only run by men's orders, but also men's attitudes and moods are what dictate the reactions of the rest of the family.

The people came out of their houses and smelled the hot stinging air and covered their noses from it... Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly... The children stood near by... exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break (Steinbeck 2).

Knowing that they are on the top of the family, men have to show strength, if not real strength, a fake firmness would help to serve in keeping men in possession of the hierarchical patriarchy and to have the family's life back into its old normalcy. “After



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a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break..." (3).

In chapter two, men are holding the same position in a different context. When the owners come to take over the land, men stand and lead the conversation. Even though the conversation ends with the owners victorious and the farmers defeated, farmers, as heads of the family still ranked in the top of the family. This is palpably seen through the reaction of the wives towards men's talking to the owners, and later through men's silence after the owners left.

... And at last the owner men drove into the dooryards and sat in their cars to talk out of the windows. The tenant men stood beside the cars for a while... In the open doors the women stood looking out, and behind them the children... The women and the children watched their men talking to the owner men. They were silent... The women moved cautiously out of the doorways toward their men. After a time the women asked, What did he want? (19).

As the owners leave the farm, events began to draw the novel's features and the decline of men's direct rule begins to draw its line. "...And the women went on with the work, but all the time they watched the men squatting in the dust—perplexed and figuring" (Steinbeck 22). In the beginning, men don't collapse at once, but they fail to maintain the stability while women are still doing their duties as wives and mothers. Yet there is a case of man's collapse when the husband of Rose of Sharon, Connie Rivers, abandons the family. However, Steinbeck describes the men of families as having their strength demising when the entourage begins to change around them. The latter is seen in the reaction of the group of men among which there are Pa Joad and Tom Joad. In the middle of men's failure to do their natural duty which is to guarantee a descent lives for their starving families, women are still doing their duties in a perfect manner. "In one of the tents a child wailed in complaint, and a woman's soft voice soothed it and then broke into a low song, "Jesus loves you in the

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night. Sleep good, sleep good. Jesus watches in the night. Sleep, oh, sleep, oh” (124). Motherhood is not affected by the status quo even though women are aware of the catastrophic situation just as much as men do.

Earlier in the novel, some events taking place depict the patriarchal quality of the Oklahoman society and the matriarchal struggle. When the Joads are ordered to leave, Ma Joad asks her husband about what the family is to do, and then Pa responds in a way that is full of hegemony.

what did he want ?

We got to get off, Pa said.

Where‘ll we go?, Ma asked

We don‘t know. We don‘t know. Back to the house !

And the women back to the house quickly, and quietly (124).

When the Joads sit discussing what to do before heading to California, as per normal, Pa is the responsible for doing the leading thing, dictates what the family should do. In such cases, if a man needs an opinion, he technically would turn to another man. So, Pa asks Uncle John for any possible suggestions, but Uncle John is not fit for such a task. On her part, Ma tries to provide with her suggestions for the good of the family. However, regardless of her idea's validity, Pa as the head of the family does not want to take her seriously.

However, the patriarchy does not last for long as women turned out to be needed in helping the male leaders in maintaining family's unity and safety. Ma Joad disagrees when men suggest that they have to be separated, one family stays in the camp and the other (Wilsons) go for water:

Ma, we gonna catch up with ya. We wasn't gonna be gone long."... The eyes of the whole family shifted back to Ma. She was the power. "All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are

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ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up..." Her tone was cold and final. Tom said soothingly, "Ma, we can't all camp here. Ain't no water here. Ain't even much shade here. Granma, she needs shade (Steinbeck 112).

After the troubles that rise between Ruthie and Winfield against the policeman who later Tom kills, Tom decides to escape and stay out of sight for he is still in his parole. Steinbeck shows that Tom has not been helped by his father Pa, but rather by his mother. Ma prepares a careful plan for Tom to follow so that he can get to hide and cross the camp. Pa in such a situation is watching amazedly from a distance as stated in the novel: "Pa complained, seems like the man ain't got no say no more. She jus' aheller. Come time we get settled down, I'm gonna smack her (273). This very quote reflects how the traditional patriarchy was driven equal, if not replaced, with matriarchy.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

Conclusively, *the Grapes of Wrath* is a novel that clearly portrays the Great Depression and the misery of the defeated families who had to move from the homeland to another land where they have been exposed to harsh inhumane conditions that led them to spiritual, social and ideological changes. For those who read for pleasure, the novel will seem to be a straight normal narrative, but for those who read for analysis, the novel is going to be described as a rich field in which philosophy, morality and socio-political commentary are planted.

## **General Conclusion**

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### **General Conclusion**

The early 1900's were distinctively marked by the unprecedented events that later had great effects on the landscape of the United States of America. The nineteen twenties was a decade known as the Roaring Twenties. The years were a prosperous period in which the United States enjoyed an economic boom that resulted in an immense widespread of business and growth in the salaries. The decade was equally a period of remarkable change as the new technological invention invaded the daily lives of the Americans and replaced the traditional life. Women, however, were given the right to vote, their attitudes and looks changed as their role changed. Literary speaking, the works of the period accurately reflected its social context. Characters were described as rich, lustful and happy. In a nutshell, the decade was one of a kind but unfortunately for the American it soon ended, and its end was marked by the Stock Market Crash.

On Thursday of October the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1929, the Stock Market Crash took place. The history of the United States began to take another path ever since. Economy had experienced a downturn. All sectors, private and governmental, were hit into the very depth. The Stock Market Crash, however, had its profound effects on the society. The remarkable reflection on the Americans was the mass migration from the agrarian states of the Midwest (Colorado, Kansas, Texas and mainly Oklahoma) that were described as the Dust Bowl. The government's banks dispossessed the farmers from their lands, because they could not manage to come out with crops in the middle of the severe drought. In the apex of loss of lands and distress over the situation, Oklahoman families had to travel to elsewhere to find jobs for themselves. The destination was the promised land of California where most migrants travelled in hope of finding jobs in farms during the fruit picking seasons. These families, instead of enhancing their lives, they found themselves paying for the collapse of the socio-economic system of the country.

The changes taking place in the American society drove young writers in the stream of social realism to write about what they witnessed. John Steinbeck wrote

## General Conclusion

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most of his valuable works during the years of the Great Depression, these works were known as the Dustbowl trilogy (*in Dubious Battle*, *of Mice and Men* and *the Grapes of Wrath*). In this category, *the Grapes of Wrath* had been deemed the best for it fully mimicked how the American society looked like during the Great Depression by portraying the misery of the migrating farmer families to California.

Steinbeck aimed at giving a social commentary through *the Grapes of Wrath*. The depiction of the American social life during the Great Depression was not limited at the level of describing the drought in Oklahoma or the journey along Route 66, or describing the greenish California. *The Grapes of Wrath* was credited for its high descriptive quality, because it offered a deeper portrayal of United States of America in the time of malaise.

Because the fundamental objective of the study is to show the way the American society is portrayed by John Steinbeck in *the Grapes of Wrath*, there are several conclusions that one can demonstrate after examining the American society in the novel. First, wealth was the engine that determines the nature of the relationships between the American citizens. The major issue for the migrating farmers is how to gain money from working for the Californian landowners; meanwhile the Californian landowners' biggest concern is how to spend less money for the workers. Therefore, this clash of interest has led to enlarging the gap between the rich and the poor. Second, the novel casts a wide net of the social philosophies shared by both classes of the society such as Transcendentalism, Social Darwinism, and Anti-capitalism. Last but not least, to use the family as a representative of the whole society, Steinbeck follows a line of characters' roles exchanging to show the metamorphosis that occurs in the American family which is the rise of matriarchy. By the implication of these element in his novel John Steinbeck could depict the American quotidian life during the Great Depression.

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