

Biblical Allusions in Steinbeck's

The Grapes of Wrath

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الملخص

إن الكثير من شخصيات وأحداث رواية ستاينبك عناقيد الغضب تعكس شخصيات وأحداث تاريخية ودينية وأسطورية وهذا أمر لم يحدث صدفة. فهناك بعض التلميحات الإنجيلية في عنوان الرواية نفسها. وهناك الكثير من التوازيات مع الإنجيل مثلا اسم جم كيس يبدأ بنفس الحروف التي يبدأ بها اسم المسيح عليه السلام كما أنه يسافر مع اثنا عشر شخصا إلى كاليفورنيا برحلة باتجاه جنة عدن الأمر الذي يذكرنا برحلة موسى مع شعبه حينما خرجوا من مصر وأن للمسيح اثنا عشر حوريا. ويضحى كيس بحياته من أجل توم ويقوم بالتخلي عن حياته برغبته لينقذ حياة الآخرين. وهناك توازيات أخرى مع نوم ومريم العذراء. كما يوجد تلميح آخر لخروج اليهود الأمر الذي عكس وتوازي مع الرحلة إلى كاليفورنيا.

Abstract

It is no accident that many characters and events in Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath reflect historical, religious and mythological figures. That is exactly what this study tries to prove. For example, there are certain Biblical references in the title of the novel itself. There are also many parallels to the Bible, for instance, Jim Casy has the same initials as Jesus Christ, and he travels to California with twelve people (a migration toward sort of Eden, like when Moses led his people out of Egypt). Christ had twelve apostles. Casy scarifies himself for Tom, and gives up his life willingly to help the lives of others. There are other parallels to Noah and Virgin Mary. Also,

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there is an indication to the Exodus journey which is reflected and paralleled by the journey to California.

1. Introduction:

John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in California. He attended Stanford University on and off between 1919 and 1925, but never completed his degree in biology. He wrote many stories and novels about places he loved in California, such as Of Mice and Men and East of Eden. He published The Grapes of Wrath in 1939. In 1940, Steinbeck received both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for it. In 1962 he won Nobel Prize for literature for his lifetime of writing achievements. He died in 1968⁽¹⁾.

The Grapes of Wrath is a description of a migrant farming family during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s. The Joads, our main characters, are the people through which the novel is conveyed. They have been fed false hopes towards the promised land of California. The novel is the description of this pilgrimage and the snags they face along the way. The Joads become very impoverished and the only hope for survival is the hold they have to each other.

The novel is part naturalistic epic, part dissenting tract and part romantic gospel. It presents the story of the Joads' brutal migration from Oklahoma's destroying Dust Bowl to California corrupt promised land. In their ironic Exodus from home to homelessness, from selfishness to communal love, from "I" to "we", Steinbeck's cast

unsuspecting of Sharon – all dream of a dignified society in which they can harvest the fruits of their labour. As a tall of dashed illusion, thwarted desires, inhuman suffering and betrayed promises – all strung on the most fragile thread of hope. The Grapes of Wrath is not only a piece of art, but, beyond that, has few peers in American fiction⁽²⁾.

The dust Bowl (a term coined by Reporter Robert Geiger) was an ecological disaster occurring in the 1930's in plain states such as Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. It was caused by many years of misuse and abuse of the land. There was nothing to hold the soil in place, so when the winds blew, the dry soil was swept up, creating dust storms. The people had to lock themselves in their houses until the dust blew over. When the winds finally stopped, piles of dirt had blown up against the sides of houses, sometimes burying cars. Dead animals lay everywhere. It did not rain for another five years. Farms become useless and families were forced to leave their homes, much like the Joad family⁽³⁾.

2. The Grapes of Wrath and the Bible:

2.1. *The Title of the Novel:-*

One of the most important parts of a book is its title. Some authors give a title that can only be understood one the book has been read. John Steinbeck, the author of The Grapes of Wrath, is no exception.

The Grapes of Wrath as a title was originally derived from the song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" which was written during the Civil War by Julia Howe. Julia and her husband were part of the U.S. sanitary. She visited many army union camps, when soldiers, who had read her poetry, asked her to write a song for the war. So, she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"⁽⁴⁾. Since she was very religious, Julia translated her religion in her song which is clear in this song including the title, "Hymn" usually refers to lyrics sung in churches. Also, she was mentioned "The Lord", and has capitalized the deixis "He" which refers to God:

*"Mine eyes had seen the glory of
the coming of the Lord:"
"He is trampling out of the vintage
where the grapes of wrath are
stored:" (L: 1–2)*

Again the song refers to Christ who died so that everyone's sin would be forgiven:

*As He died to make men holy, let us
die to make men free
While God is marching on. (L: 19–
20)*

Another connection between the novel and the song is the lyric:

*I have seen Him in the Watch-fired
of a hundred circling camps
(L: 5)*

This indicates how God is everywhere. We can find a similar quotation in the novel:

*Then I'll be all roun' in the dark.
I'll be ever' where – wherever
You look. Wherever they's
a fight so hungry people
can eat, I'll be there.
Wherever they's a cop
beaten' up a guy, I'll be there.
If Casy knowed, why,
I'll be in the way guys
Yell when they're mad
an' – I'll be in the way kids
laugh when they're hungry an' they
know supper's ready. An' when our
folks eat the stuff they raise an'
live in the houses they build-why,
I'll be there. (The Grapes, P. 537)(5)*

In this quotation Tom is trying to comfort everybody by assuming that they can depend on him just like people depends on God. He is picturing himself as the saviour of people, that he can see and help all. He promises to be there for everybody.

Although Steinbeck derived the title of his novel from the lyric of the song "he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored" (L: 2), Home must have taken the image from the Bible. According to my readings of the Old Testament there is a passage related to grapes and the wrath of God;

The Book of Revelation:

*And the angel thrust in his sickle into
the earth, and gathered the vine of
the earth, and cast it into the great
winepress of the wrath of God.
(14: 19)(6).*

The grapes are first mentioned in the novel at the end of chapter 25 when Grampa was expressing his desire to squash a big bunch of grapes and let them run off his chin.

*..... and in the eyes of the hungry
there is a growing wrath. In the
souls of the people the grapes of
wrath are filling and growing
heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.
(The Grapes, P. 449)*

Such lines were referred to in the Bible:-

Deuteronomy:- *Their grapes of gall, their clusters
Are bitter. Their win is position
of serpents (32: 32).*

And in Jeremiah:- *The father have been eaten
sour grapes and their
children's teeth are sent on
edge (31: 29).*

Grapes in this novel are metaphorical. When the Joads originally decide to make the long journey to California, Grampa sets a significant scene;

*Know what I'm a – gonna do? I'm
gonna pick me a wash tub full of
Grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, and
scrooge aroun' , an' let the juice
run down my pants. (The Grapes,
P. 119)*

The metaphor is found in the grapes itself being a relief from the long journey about to start, instead of filling the tub with water, he wishes to fill it with wine (grapes). Grapes also show a higher social standing by making the implication that they will be able to enjoy such simple pleasures and most likely drink of the expensive wines of the California vineyards. So, the grapes are the Joad's stronghold and

what keeps them passing on in their trip. They are their hope to achieve their dream.

The "wrath" part of the title represents the actuality of the journey, not the dream as the grapes do. Throughout their journey the Joads go through lots of difficulties that raise certain emotions such as violence, resentful anger, rage, and fury; these all relate to the "wrath" part of the title. In spite of all these worries and downfalls, they carry on with their hopes (grapes), realizing that grapes were the cause of all their hurt. Because it is their dreams (grapes) that have scorned them with wrath (Ultimate demise), the title, The Grapes of Wrath, is very fitting.

2.2. The Exodus Journey:-

In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck utilizes Biblical imagery and allusion to illustrate the struggle of the Joad family as a direct parallel to that of some Biblical references. Steinbeck has used parallels to his characters from the Bible. First of all, the novel is divided into three parts; the drought in Oklahome which stopped them from working in their farms (chapter 1 – 11), the Joad's journey to California (12 – 18), and the Joad's experience as migrant labourers in California, their Promised Land. (19 – 30). The Grapes of Wrath begins in drought and ends in flood which raises a critical issue that the story could be a retelling of the Biblical Exodus journey. Peter Lisca has noted that the novel reflects the three parts of the Old Testament Exodus account

which includes captivity, journey, and the Promised Land⁽⁷⁾. The Joad's story resembles that of the Hebrews. Just as the later were captives of Pharaoh, the Joad's are captives of their own farm. Both make long journeys until they reach their Promised Land. Setting out on Route 66, the Joads and other Okies wander through the wilderness of the American southwest, cross the desert, and finally arrive in the Promised Land of California.

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66 – the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield – over the red lands and the gray lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that hour up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from tributary side roads, from the

wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road the road of flight. (The Grapes, P. 160 – 161).

This quotation shows Steinbeck's success to merge deep mythical concerns with the American experience. In The Grapes of Wrath he has indulged biblical, historical and mythical allusions with the American reality of poverty and depression. This part of the tale (the road) had little historical authenticity, Steinbeck exaggerated in describing Route 66 in order to give the story religious back-up, so that to put the reader in the picture and to able enable him to contrast the suffering of this journey with that of the Exodus.

The Route 66 was not a Biblical Camel track, instead it is a highway that was built since the 1920s. It provides a direct route from the southwest to the California coast. Steinbeck treats the road like a covered wagon trail than the fast, modern highway it actually was. In reality, if their car was in good shape, an Oklahoma family in the 1930s could make it to California in three days. Rather than taking weeks yarning about their hardship with other travellers and singing folk songs around campfires⁽⁸⁾.

Along the way, they set up roadside camps where they devise certain laws to govern themselves. Grandpa and Grandma die before they reach the Promised Land. As the Joads drive into this new Eden, Tom runs over a rattle snake suggestion that this Eden is free of evil.

But it is no. 7. Instead, the new Eden is like the old land of bondage. It is filed with Californians who oppress the newcomers with poverty wages, intermittent work, vigilante deputies and strike – breaking violence. Nevertheless, the ultimate victory of the chosen people is assured Ma Joad's famous statement is prophetic "..... why, we're the people – we go on". (The Grapes, P. 383).

2.3. Biblical Characters:-

As the Joads leave their land they mount the truck two by two, as Noah Joad observes from the ground. Chapter (10) is almost an allusion to the story of Noah's Ark;

*..... the rest swarmed up on top of
the load, Connie and Rose of Sharon,
Pa and uncle John, Ruthie and
Winfield,
Tom and the preacher. Noah stood on
the ground looking up at the great
load of them sitting on top of the
truck. (The Grapes, P. 84)*

Later in California, winter rain soon swell into a second Noah's flood, just as mentioned in the Bible,
Genesis – *And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights*
(7: 12).

The remnant of the Joad family shelter in an abandoned boxcar which stands in as the new Noah's Ark, and Pa Joad – like a second Noah – is able to stave off the rising water when Rose of Sharon goes into labour. Her child is born dead, however, and is put, Moses – like, into a basket which uncle John launches upon the flood waters. "Go down and tell' em," (The Grapes, P. 459).

Exodus: *She got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.*
(2: 3).

As the waters begin to recede and spring approaches, the Joads leave their boxcar and shelter in an abandoned barn, the novel's equivalent of the stable at Bethlehem. Here a miraculous birth occurs. In the barn, the Joads meet a desperate boy whose father is dying of starvation. Realizing that the man is unable to swallow food, Rose of Sharon breast feeds him⁽⁹⁾.

Not only Sharon's baby, but there is another Moses – type in the novel. Tom serves as a leader of the people as they journey toward the Promised Land. Like Moses, he has killed a man and had been away for a time before rejoining his people and becoming their

leader. He has a younger brother just like Moses (Aaron – Al) who serves as an aid for the leader. This parallel ends before the completion of the story.

There could possibly be another Moses – like leader in the novel. Jim Casy's character could be symbolically tied into the Biblical hero of Moses, in the book of Exodus Moses guided thousands of people out of severe slavery and harsh treatment in Egypt. From there he led them to the Promised Land the flowed with milk and honey. Much is the same when looking at The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck could possibly be trying to infer the Joad family as being the struggling Exodus people. Casy acts as a leader who directs the Joads out of famine and hard times during the 1930's in Oklahoma and into California where they can begin a new life with hope of a better future.

A well-known sacrificial figure in history is Jesus Christ, a Biblical figure who gave his life for the salvation of mankind. In the novel, the embodiment of sacrifice is found in former preacher Jim Casy. Known as the Christ figure of the novel, he devotes much of his time fighting against the injustice that the families are experiencing in their job searches. Casy even holds a hidden clue in his name. the initials of Jim Casy are the same as those of Jesus Christ Steinbeck implies that Pa Joad is symbolically a typical Christian who is struggling in a world of sin. The famine and difficult conditions of the great depression stand for the sin that is surrounding this battling

Christian. As a result, this sinner turns to the lord for salvation and release from the sin. Jim Casy gives his guidance and direction as Pa Joad and his family takes in his advice. When he is saying grace in chapter 8, he compares himself to Jesus, "I been in the hills, thinking almost you might say like Jesus when into the wilderness to think His way out of troubles". (The Grapes, P. 70).

During a quarrel with a labour recruiter and a deputy, Casy leaves himself to "take the blame", "they'll jus' put me in jail, an' I ain't doin' nothin' but set around". (The Grapes, P. 363). He also attempts to organize under rapid migrant workers and fights for the rights of starving families;

*Casy stared blindly at the light. He
breathed heavily. "Listen", he said.
"You fell as don't know what you're
doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids".
"Shut up, you red 0 son-
of-a-bitch". A short heavy man
stepped into the light. He carried a
new white pick handle. Casy went on,
"You don' know what you're a-doin'".
The heavy man swung with the pick
handle. Casy dodged down into the
swing. The heavy club crushed into
the side of his head with a dull*

*crunch of bone, and Casy fell
sideways out of the light... The
flashlight bean dropped, searched
and found Casy's crushed head. (The
Grapes, P. 527).*

This parallel the passion of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament, where he defends his purpose "that I should give testimony to the truth" found in John: (18: 37).

Towards the end of the novel, Steinbeck pulls out all the Biblical stops to imply this optimistic conclusion to his tragic story. Jim Casy, who combines elements of John the Baptist and Jesus, is killed by strike breakers, but his mantle descends on the Tom Joad, whose character combines elements of Jesus and Moses. When Casy is struck down, Tom kills his attacker⁽¹⁰⁾. One recalls how Jesus told his followers to put down their swords (Mathew 26: 52). Tom proclaims, "Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there". (The Grapes, P. 472).

Maternity creates the tendency for women to be more gentle and nurturing than males. "Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. She balanced on her toes now, for the baby's sake. And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms of reproduction and of motherhood". (The Grapes, P. 130). A woman, pregnant or not, naturally tends to be a mother figure, and so

her relations with other people reflects that mentality, "The adults moved toward the lighted kitchen through the deep dusk, and Ma served them greens and side – meat in time plates". (The Grapes, P. 141). Ma Joad serves her family before herself, making sure that they have nourishment.

Women can change roles with men, they can be sacrificial and the later can be nurturing. The sacrificial aspect is that of woman giving up her own comfort in order to bring a new life into the world, avoiding the pains of labour. The best Biblical example of a sacrificial female is Virgin Mary. In The Grapes of Wrath, Ma Joad display a parallel between her and Virgin Mary through her strength and selflessness during Granma's death, she suffers the loss of Granma lonely so that the family would have no trouble crossing through to California.

Ma raised her eyes and looked over the valley. "Granma's dead". They looked at her, all of them, and Pa asked, "When?" "Before they stopped us las' night". "So that's why you didn' wan'em to look". "I was afraid we wouldn't get acrost", she saidThe family looked at Ma with a little terror at her strength Casy said in wonder, "All night long, an'

*she was alone". And he said, "John,
there's a woman so great with
love.....". (The Grapes, P. 313).*

Another image of Mary in the novel is Rose if Sharon. From being young and immature, she develops into a maternal figure after the death of her child. She nurses a starting man back to health. Here, she abandons her pride and humble herself in order to provide nurture and sacrifice for the suffering man. She is a Christ – like figure, an individual that lives life not for the elevation of oneself but for the betterment of those around them, for the greater good.

3. Conclusion:

It is through the use of Biblical allusion and imagery that Steinbeck gives The Grapes of Wrath a powerful message along with pure artistic genius. The central characters are based on religious archetypes. Jim Casy is commonly known as the Christ figure, Tom Joad is a less – apparent Christ figure, the stillborn child is a Moses reference, and there is the idea of the "Promised Land" a parallel to the Exodus in the Old Testament. In many ways, Christ could also be considered a Moses figure because of His leading His people to the "Promised Land". Other less popular, but equally significant, parallels are that of Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon as being the Madonna figures of the novel.

Notes:

- 1- John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath Text and Criticism, Ed. Peter Lisca (new York: Penguin, 1972), P. 47.
- 2- www.steinbeck.sjsu.edu/home/index.),p.3.
- 3- www.steinbeck.sjsu.edu/home/index.),p.3.
- 4- Jackson Benson, The True Adventures of John Steinbeck: A Biography. (New York: Viking Publishers, 1984), p. 102.
- 5- John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath. (New York: Penguin Book Ltd., 1972). This edition will be used for all the quotations from Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. Subsequent quotations will be followed by a page reference to this edition.
- 6- The Holly Bible, (International Bible Society, 1999). This edition will be used for all the quotations from the Bible. Subsequent quotations will be followed by a section reference to this edition.
- 7- Peter Lisca, "The Dynamics of Community in The Grapes of Wrath in Twentieth Century Interpretation of the Grapes of Wrath, ed.: Robert Con Davis, (Englewood, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, inc., 1982), p. 40.
- 8- Peter Lisca, John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth. (New York: Crowell, 1978), P. 63.
- 9- [www.Rev.TylerA.Strand.\"GrapesandWrath\".2005.p.2.](http://www.Rev.TylerA.Strand.\)
- 10- www.KeithWindschuttle.Steinbeck'smythoftheOkies.2005.p.3.

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