

Maturation through Suffering in Steinbeck's Novel The Grapes of Wrath

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores the development of the central characters in John Steinbeck's novel The Grapes of Wrath (1939) by approaching it thematically and analytically. These characters move west to California as a result of the Great Depression which was followed by the Dust Bowl of the 1930s affecting the Great Plains and the states of Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas and creating plight and horror. In The Grapes of Wrath, the fictional characters move west seeking labor, security, and personal dignity. Some of them die, others starve and become without values. Fortunately, the Joads develop a sense of unity with their fellow emigrants who share the same experience of displacement and exploitation by capitalists.

Four main results are the outcome of this study. Firstly, Steinbeck's success in documenting a modern tragedy by employing social realism is evident in this novel. Secondly, the central characters grow and develop social awareness through suffering. Thirdly, Symbols and imagery in the novel create a lasting-effect in the reader's mind. Finally, man can learn from negative experiences positive values.

Key Words: capitalism, emigrants, depression, social realism.

المستخلص:

النضج عقب المعاناة في رواية ستاينبك عناقيد الغضب

تتناول هذه الدراسة تطور الشخصيات عقب المعاناة في رواية الكاتب الأمريكي جون ستاينبك عناقيد الغضب (1939) والتي تحكي عن نزوح المهاجرين من الولايات الوسط التي أصابها الجفاف وعوامل التعرية مما أدى الى هجرة جماعية غربا الى كاليفورنيا بحثا عن لقمة العيش وفرارا من شبح المجاعة الذي اصبح وشيكا وذلك في بداية حقبة الثلاثينات. في الرواية نجد أن هذه الشخصيات التي رسمها الكاتب بدأت فعلاً بالفرار وهجرت مواطنها بعد أن اصابها الرعب ورأت كيف أن العديد من الأسر حزمت ما تيسر من أمتعة وإدارت ظهرها للولايات التي اصابها الجذب والإحباط وهي اركنساس، أيوا، كنساس، ميسوري، نبراسكا، أوكلاهوما ونكساس. في رحلة المعاناة هذه غربا، تحمل البعض ومات الآخر وكانت بعض الشخصيات مثل آل جود مصدر إلهام وقيادة للآخرين بحسب وصف الرواية. من هذا المنطلق فان هذه الدراسة تتناول بالتحليل مواضيع الرواية وشخصياتها الرئيسية.

توصلت الدراسة الى أربع نتائج وهي: أولاً أنتج ستاينبك رواية واقعية اجتماعية صارت تحفة أدبية متفردة. ثانياً المعاناة قد تهزم البعض ولكنها بلا شك تنمي قدرات الآخرين على التحمل والقيادة خاصة عندما يكتسبوا من خلال التجربة النضج والوعي اللازمين كما حدث لآل جود في الرواية. ثالثاً قدمت الرواية نقدا صادقا للتجربة الرأسمالية الأمريكية و أبرزت الوجه الشرير لهذه المؤسسة. رابعاً يمكن للإنسان أن يتعلم من التجارب المريرة والسالبة قيماً جديدة.

الكلمات الدلالية: الرأسمالية، المهاجرون، الإحباط، الواقعية الاجتماعية.

INTRODUCTION:

John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968) is a modern American writer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1962, and became something like a legend after his death probably for his The current study investigates the thematic development of the main characters in John

realistic depiction of imaginative current issues in his works as well as his keen social perception of the serious problems that challenge human existence in our modern age. Steinbeck's novel The Grapes of Wrath (1939) by employing a descriptive analytical technique

so as to reveal and re-evaluate the inherent artistic qualities of the literary work.

The study's main hypothesis rests on the presupposition that the fictional characters in this novel, particularly Tom Joad, Casy the preacher, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon acquire knowledge and realization of their place in society during their journey to California. They gain insights into their existence through suffering. Their sense of affinity with the people around them and society at large increases as they move West. They become more selfless, admirably humane and considerate as they experience pain, and gain better self-realization through suffering. Though each of these four characters has a different path from the others, their basic need for survival becomes a unifying element shaping out their struggle. Moreover, their sense of solidarity and belonging lead them to self-denial.

Has Steinbeck succeeded in depicting his fictional characters realistically? Does suffering necessarily entail learning and maturation? These questions, along with content-based, brainstorming enquiries are central to this study beside focusing on the development of the central characters in this novel as part of the thematic and textual analysis.

1.0. Methodology of the Study:

The study follows a descriptive analytical approach by tracing the development of the central characters in Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* for thematic appreciation. However, the researcher believes that literary works are often difficult to treat objectively, unlike other domains of language such as applied linguistics, where application of scientific data gathering and analysis can be performed considerably. Accordingly, other techniques that can help this study meet the conditions of scientific research are employed, too. Thus, argument, discourse analysis and stylistic techniques for the service of the study.

Structurally, section one is an introduction which states briefly the problem of the study, its hypotheses, questions and significance. Section two is divided into two sub-sections the first is this one which deals with the methodology of the study. The second is literature review which operates as a theoretical framework for the study. Section three will be devoted to content-based analysis beside secondary sources that all deal with the novel in question. Section Four states bluntly the findings or results of the study. Section Five is a conclusion with brief discussion on the results.

1.1 Literature Review:

When John Steinbeck published his novel *In Dubious Battle* in 1936, most critics described it as a genuine social commentary on the socio-economic conditions of the workers in 20th century America. The novel's central character is an 'activist' who leads the organization of a strike by the fruit-pickers who could no longer stand the exploitation exerted by the landlords leaving them in a state of plight and 'without'. The critics who wrote in favor of the novel hailed it as an original work of art that contributes to the welfare of the people by depicting a realistic picture of the American experience. In Fred T. March's words the novel is "the best labor and strike novel to come out of our contemporary economic and social unrest." On the other hand, it was quite reasonable for other critics to stand against this work and label it as 'left-wing propaganda'. Steinbeck himself was afraid that it might be taken as such whereas he meant to write a work of artistic quality that is far beyond the limitations of politics, embracing universal and human values. His own words testify to his intention: "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 ... I have used a small strike in an orchard valley as a symbol of man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself." (Steinbeck: retrieved 2015)

Evidently, Steinbeck exploited fact, a strike in a Californian Valley, blended it with fiction and the outcome is In Dubious Battle, a novel which foreshadowed and paved the way for his latter and more successful novel, The Grapes of Wrath(1939), our current subject of study. Before this, he published Tortilla Flat in 1935 another commercially successful novel. His earlier works include Cup of Gold (1927), The Pastures of Heaven (short stories, 1932), To a God Unknown (1933). In 1937, Steinbeck published his popularly as well as critically well-received Of Mice and Men, following it with The Long Valley, a collection of short stories in 1938. His latter novels include:

The Moon is Down	1942
Cannery Row	1945
The Wayward Bus	1947
The Pearl	1947 (Novella)
Burning Bright	1947 (Novella)
East of Eden	1952
Sweet Thursday	1954

The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication
1957

The Winter of our Discontent 1961.
(Steinbeck: retrieved 2015)

Apart from the above list which contains his novels and other fictional works, Steinbeck has a tremendous repertoire of non-fictional works including his reports and essays during the First World War, when he worked as a reporter. Being an inhabitant of one of the regions in the west, namely Salinas California where he grew up, he was able to witness and depict honestly the social protest in The Grapes of Wrath very well. His compassion for writing and becoming a reporter, urged by his mother who was a teacher, made him leave college without graduation and work for

newspapers. His work as a journalist appeared in his works particularly in this novel where he employs some factual chapters to interrupt the flow of the narrative so as to overshadow and to give the reader a chance to be engaged intellectually before letting go of the emotional identification with his fictional characters. Some critics and most readers find these intercalary chapters annoying and claim that the author's work as a reporter has affected his craft of fiction. After the heat of the novel's first appearance in the bookshops, more and more readers came to acknowledge its greatness making it a best-seller in America, except in the states affected by the Dust Bowl where the authorities banned the book and burned all the copies in the bookshops. Though Steinbeck was the son of the same plains and a fellow worker on the same farms, the residents considered his work as belittling and out of sheer mockery. They saw in the novel's straightforward depiction of the Okies' plight an extreme sarcasm and humiliation and denied the truthfulness of the depiction. Actually, the great fuss caused by this banning of the novel in the Okies; states beside he riots that accompanied the burning of the books contributed to increase the popularity of the novel. Time healed the wounds and the authorities allowed the book again. The new readers in the formerly hostile states received the old story anew; this time with admiration and rejoice.

According to Frederick I. Carpenter, Steinbeck's social philosophy rests on three strands apparent as themes in the novel. These are "the Emersonian concept of the 'Oversoul', the idea of a humanism expressed by the love of all persons and the embracing of mass democracy found in the works of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg, and the pragmatism of Henry James." In the same streak, Chester

E. Eisinger views the Jeffersonian agrarianism of having some sort of connection between humankind and land through which people gain identity and pay the 'homeland' love and respect. (Carpenter: 1957)

Thematic elements interweave together so as to bring out the sum-total of the story as a unified whole. The Grapes of Wrath elaborates on the relationship between man and land in a journey taken by so critics as a symbolic one to "the Promised Land," others looked at it as a pragmatic experience of modern age that has little to do with the past. Todd Lieber explains this relationship between man and his surroundings whatever form they might take a place or stone or an object or the land. He states that this kind of relatedness is obvious, though mysterious and inexplicable, in most of Steinbeck's works. Suggesting that the relationship is a kind of 'monism,' indicating that all things are one and one by definition is all. In The Grapes of Wrath, characters move from being separate entities or individuals towards becoming one group. (Lieber: 2003, 267)

Miriam Veneros in her study "Inversion of biblical symbols in The Grapes of Wrath" claims that the allusions and symbols found in the novel can be better interpreted as inversions of the traditional biblical symbols, in such a way that the novel can be considered a new 'bible. Her study is based on four characters who are taken to stand symbolically and allegorically as new saviors. The characters are Tom Joad (Chris, savior of all people), Ma Joad (Messenger of her own family), the stillborn baby Joad (Moses) and Rose of Sharon (Mother Nature). However, instead of approaching these allegorical symbols as versions of the Bible, Veneros argues that they are 'inversions'. As Tom embraces survival for people, Ma's main

concern is her family, baby Joad is stillborn when put on river, and Rose of Sharon feeds a man out of motherly instinctive nature, So according to Veneros, " this is not achieved through the guidance of God, but through their love for nature, people and social justice" (Veneros: 2016, 171)

2.0. The Grapes of Wrath:

The depression of the late 1920s was a hard time for most Americans especially the small farmers who tried to eke out a living within a situation ultimately threatening. The 'great depression' occurred as a result of the stock market crash. In his novel The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck draws a very realistic picture of the plight of the American people at that time. Those who were in Oklahoma and central states generally used to grow cotton before the tragic hit of the drought which turned the best topsoil to dust, and by extension turned the lives of the people to a nightmare. Consequently, most farmers found it very hard to cope with the new living conditions. They could not afford to satisfy the basic needs of their families due to the shooting up of prices and shortage of money. The new economic conditions resulted in a state of panic among most low-income families all over the country. As the majority of them were basically first generation or second generation immigrants seeking a refuge from the hardships of their home countries, it was suitable for them to move somewhere else, where the effects of the drought might be less and the living conditions might be better. This is quite conforming to the traits of the American character since Americans are described as a moving-nation and news of the availability of work opportunities in California spread all over the country. However, this time emigration was westward contrary to their first journey from the Old World.

John Steinbeck in his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts the story of the Joads family who heard that workers were needed to pick up ripen fruit in California. Being tracted out of their homes and farms, they were ready to go west. As the story unfolds during the course of the journey, we become in touch with one of the most moving human scenes in the history of American fiction when Rose a Sharon breastfeeds a starving man, the catalogue of human sorrows made the imaginative reader speechless. It is "not since Dicken's portrayal of the slums of Victorian England has a novelist produced such an enduring definition of his age." (Windschuttle: 2002, 24)

On their way westward, the weak and the old died, children suffered, and those who were once firm believers and faithful dreamers expressed their dissatisfaction and disbelief. It was a journey into the "self," too in which the young were challenged and the optimists became skeptical about the essence of the American experience. In their destination California, those emigrants experienced exploitation and faced hunger. Fruit was ripen, but most of it was left to rot. Even good food was purposefully destroyed so as to keep the prices high. Reality was even harsher than fiction. No one would believe what happened to the Joads except those who witnessed what happened or read with open minds the story of the Joads. As the caravans of the dispossessed moved west, the reality began to unfold, and so many questions were evident in the hungry eyes of the dispossessed. Naturally anger would replace hunger. A rebellion was in the making.

People feel related to the land as long as it continues to secure food and shelter for them. This mutual relationship of give and take is in itself an unwritten law, a spiritual bond that fosters feelings of affinity and belonging. When that land becomes impotent or infertile,

neither dreams nor people grow. This mutual relationship of cause and effect, desertification and departure, is evident in several modern novels like *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster and *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Allan Paton. So, "keep it, guard it, care for it. For it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed." (Allan Paton: 1988,3). However, leaving homelands behind never entails erasing happier memories of childhood or earlier engagements. People often look back in anger and nostalgia, just as in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Most of the immigrant families in Steinbeck's novel sought a way out of the dilemma as thousands of them were heading or literally 'crawling' on the highway westward. The derogatory epithet 'the Okies' chased these Oklahoma, immigrant farmers wherever they went. It was coined in time to determine their label and tag their price. Those farmers who were driven out of their lands gathered in troops along the highway looking for safe camps or means of survival in an unwelcoming environment. The threat of losing the weaklings and sick during their mad journey west created a general mood of panic among them. Waves after waves of camps dwellers filled every corner and space. Yet, the capitalists of the era knew how to bring more people to their fields by distributing more handbills to draw more 'Okies' and in the meantime lower their wages. No one else excelled Steinbeck in drawing this vivid picture of exploitation and savagery:

And then the dispossessed were drawn west from Kansa, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, from Nevada and Arkansas tribes, dusted out, tracted out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry, twenty thousand, and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. (P.272).



In California, the Joads experienced very hard times. They, like most Americans in that period, fell a victim of the Great Depression of the late 1920s. Not only couldn't they find work, but they also saw with their own eyes hunger, sickness and death. It was a hard time for all Americans who presumably "changed to hate each other" as a result of fear and despair. Economic conditions changed the morale and manners in the same way so the camps fostered people whose ethics and conducts were alien and strange. (Steinbeck: 1978, x) However, there is another side to the picture as some Americans resisted change or lowering their standards of wrong and right. In fact, so many immigrants were holding fast to the 'fundamental decencies of life'. In this novel the Joads are among those who never lost faith in treating people as human beings in all circumstances. They never refused shelter or food for anyone who joined them or asked so during their painful journey to the unknown. However insecure they felt, they consistently displayed unflinching belief in the 'goodness of man' and sacredness of his life. Their inner vision and feeling of responsibility towards their fellow men, especially Ma and Tom Joad, gave them insight and hope that people would one day rise to change since they have a 'quality dream' i.e. the American Dream. Therefore, in spite of the sufferings of these people, the novel as a whole approves of and favors the American Dream even in times of hunger and Depression.

Obviously, John Steinbeck the Literature Nobel Prize winner in 1962 is in favor of the 'American Dream'. Though his novel describes and documents a period of greater sufferings and hardships, underneath is a restatement and assurance of the possibility of creating a new version of life far better than what is depicted in that particular historical moment with all its complications.

It is true that the farmers are driven out of the land and workers are replaced by the ugly machine. Those are the people whose hopes are shattered and anticipations break apart. Yet, some of them resisted the idea of surrender to dismay and despair. How could they continue to live without their imperishable dream? Steinbeck comments on this strong belief that characterizes Americans' way of thinking: "One of the characteristics most puzzling to the foreign observer is the strong and imperishable dream the American carries. On inspection, it is found that the dream has little to do with the reality in American life." (Steinbeck: 1970, 59). The Depression of the late twenties and early thirties represented a real challenge to the American experience as evident in this novel which honestly portrays the depth of the human experience lived by the immigrants. Moving west only for survival, they found themselves obliged to settle for a half in camps or live under trees beside the highway like wild street-dogs. Not only this deplorable state of existence brought them down to knees, but also the greediness of the unseen forces responsible for their tragedy caused them to suffer more and feel terribly stricken. Capitalism represented by the **Bank**, the **Company** and the **Tractor**, could never sympathize with these victims. Capitalists, parasites and social climbers who made use of the situation could not look at themselves as opportunists. They considered their work quite justified. Most of them blame the bank by saying 'it has no heart', and in the mean time their income increases. It is evident throughout the story that the immigrants have been exploited dreadfully by the capitalists. This is why when the tenants group together and declare their war against the bank, those heartless capitalists become angry and stand against rebellion.

On the way to 'nowhere' and to the 'unknown' some migrants drop by, some families break up, and the Joads are not an exception. In the story Pa tells uncle John openly that things are falling apart, 'center cannot hold': " don't you go away. We are droppin' folks all the time Grampa an' Granma dead, Noah an' Connie run out, an' the Preacher – in Jail." (P.347) Although the Joads tried to stick together but the reality was beyond their wishes. Yet, one is missing the point if judged them as new people due to this learning experience. They resisted change for the worse especially Tom and Ma. We find Ma unwilling to let her daughter Rose of Sharon behave selfishly by reminding her that a larger context exists: "Rosasharan you're jest one person, an they's a lot of other folks." (P.366). Poverty has not made the Joads lose their sense of responsibility towards others. In this view, the story persistently hints at the true spirit of the poor, the majority who were hit and beaten by the depression, the true heirs of the American dream especially the farmers, the salt of the earth.

The hope that the migrants will transcend their circumstances is signified by the identification of major characters, such as Casy, Tom, Ma, and Rose of Sharon, with the natural world. Their individual experiences are based on a willingness to view themselves not only as a part of the human community, but as a part of nature as well. In this way, the migrants achieve a sense of immortality lacking in the previous two novels. This is what Ma means when she tells Tom, "We're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people-we go on" (GW 360). The enduring nature of the migrants is symbolized by the tortoise, which insistently pursues its travels despite repeated interference and seemingly

insurmountable barriers. (Josephine Levy: 1994, 69)

The Joads are kind and considerate people; two qualities seem quite inherent in them throughout this novel. In the closing chapter, Rose of Sharon feeds a starving man from her breast so as to save his life. A new sense of solidarity takes its full shape among the camp-dwellers who established their own codes and mores in the hope of a better future. Most of them would not surrender to hopelessness. They were waiting for some change to take place. How brave their new spirit was , though dispossessed:

In the evening a strange thing happened. The twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss and the golden time in the west was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awestruck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. (P.225)

This is the new spirit of the people who lost everything except their right to live up to their expectations. Some grew even more stronger through this learning experience like Casy, the preacher whose sense of mission made him sacrifice so as to protect his friend Tom. Earlier to this his obligation towards the immigrants made him join the group of the strikers. Similarly, Tom matured significantly during the course of the action and became a fully developed character. Approaching the end of the story, we see how he is reluctant to carry on what Casy has begun. Thus, it is evident that suffering has resulted in some kind of realization for most immigrants; a suggestion clearly made in the cases of the preacher and Tom.

2.1. The Nightmare of Exploitation:

One of the most depressing the portrayal of 'the capitalist' in this novel is how these money-makers, in the course of their greed and willingness to make profit, behave selfishly and inhumanly. They never feel guilty about it, when those immigrants are forced to work in return for a meal. Taking advantage of the helpless and wretched people was justified for them under the guise of the cliché 'business is business'. Tom Joad seems burdened with emotions of misery and bewilderment when he says: " Pa's all mad about it costs fifty cents just to camp under a tree he can't see that nowadays. Setting a-cusin. Says next thing they'll sell ya a little tank a air." (P. 203). In fact, what Tom complains about is typical of the opportunists who live like 'leeches' on human blood. They grow big at the expense of their fellowmen whose suffering is only a fuel to their wealth. When the immigrants ask for work they lower their wages, when they come to buy things from them they charge too much. The plight of 'the Okies' seem to feed these human parasites viewed in this saga of human misery. Pa seems to understand the nature of those who grow big within such economic conditions, that is why he says next thing they will charge money for a tank of air.

It is normal to find out that some of those immigrants have lost their sense of responsibility towards others. Those who were self-centered by nature would not stand such a test. Some of them would only look for the advantage of their family not the community or society at large. The law of the jungle would rule as the master of the situation, no wonder. "Three dollars a day. I got Damn sick of creeping for my dinner – and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day and it comes every day." 'That's right the tenant said.' "But for your three dollars a day fifteen or twenty families can't eat at all." (P. 41)

The speaker is Joe the cat-driver and it is clear that he cannot think about any one else except his own family. For him his selfishness is justified as he feels completely unrelated and cut-off from the rest of the society, particularly when he says: "You got no call to worry about any body's kids but your own." (P.42). Undoubtedly, most immigrants realize that the owners take advantage of them. One of them says: " Jesus, they want a lot for a ol' tire. They look a fella over. They know he got to go on. They know he can't wait. And the price goes up. Take it or leave it." (P.137). No one can venture to 'leave it', since there are no softer options.

However, the true spirit of the pioneers seems to be an inherent quality even among those people who encountered a very special experience that challenged their values. Most of them could not give up hope, they continued to believe that things would turn out all right at the end because this is their land, their country and future. Like the early settlers who encountered loss and diseases but went on trying to create something new in an unwelcoming environment. Their fathers and grandfathers tamed the wild natural forces and manifested their own destiny. For the early settlers the New World stood dark and threatening ahead of them but they could not retreat or go back though some of them were still colonials and to a very large extent still Europeans at heart. They moved on in spite of the challenges fostering the American Revolution (1775 – 1782) and building a new republic out of the wilderness. Describing Americans as a moving-people, John Steinbeck in *American History* and Americans, Richard Lingemann in *A Consonance of Towns*, and Julie Joffrey in *Ladies Have the Hardest Time that Emigrated by Land* in *The Private Side of American History*, all agree that Americans are restless people and America is a moving nation. (Inge:1990, 1-3)

Furthermore, it is certain that most Americans look at change as a matter of fact depending on the lifestyle they have inherited from their ancestors. It is true that some of the early settlers were still colonial at heart and tried desperately to hold fast their homelands' values and standards of conduct but most of them realized that a new nation was in the making and felt free to express their opinions about it. However, the conflict between old and new expectations persisted for a long time. Needless to say that the early settlement of America divided into two streams, one in the south and the other is in New England. Accordingly, the characters of the people were shaped in the same way. The movement from one place to another characterized the whole American experience though some were held back with fear as Robert Frost (1874 – 1963) suggested in his poem "The Gift Outright":

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials. (Frost: 1976, 418)

The above poem which was delivered the inauguration ceremony of J. F. Kennedy (1961) addresses bravely the subject of the conflict between the east and the west in the American history. It assumes that people should live up to their expectations without fearing change as long as it is necessary for their existence. Westward migration earlier in the 19th century and later in the 20th century was dictated by a number of reasons such as "the love of the unknown, the desire to get rich quick, the necessity of escaping the law, or the freedom to be an individualist. A side from personal reasons, the movement was given a strong political support through the development of an idea best known as

Manifest Destiny" (Inge and Mann: 1990, 1 & 68) . These reasons could be true for the early immigration but what happened during the Depression years has very little to do with that. Yet, for historians like Fredrick Turner (1861 – 1932) these migrants become more Americans the farther west they go. (Turner: 1964, 74). However, in this time of great misery and depression these assumptions were at stake. No one could imagine the extent of plight or the magnitude of the experience 'the Okies' underwent. Steinbeck tried to employ fiction seeking a better documentation for a real tragedy.

The introduction of large-scale mechanized farming in the twentieth century, as apparent in the novel, has affected the lives of the small farmers. Most of these farmers took loans payable in installments from the bank and companies. Naturally, after some time they could not pay back these installments. The banks, supported by the capitalists who own these companies took over the land from these helpless farmers. No protest whatsoever could make the usurpers think about the callousness of their action. It is pay or let go. Alas, words of protest cannot help:

Grampa killed the Indians, Pa killed the snakes for the lands. May be we can kill the banks – they're worth than Indians and snakes. May be we got to fight to keep our land, like Pa and Grampa did. And now the owner men grew angry. "You'll have to go." "But it's ours," The tenant men cried. "We – ." "No. The bank, the monster owns it": "You'll have to go". "We'll get our guns, like Grampa when the Indians came. What then? But if we go, where'll we go? How'll we go? We got no money. We are sorry, said the owner men. The bank, the fifty-thousand-acre owner cannot be responsible. (P.37)

No one can deny that the above quotation from the novel in question reveals the quality of exploitation these migrants encountered. The novel states clearly that those capitalists were inconsiderate. Steinbeck himself agreed to the fact that his novel is straightforward in handling its subject of the implications of the tragedy of the Great Depression by claiming that *The Grapes of Wrath* is not obscure in what it tries to say. (Steinbeck, 1969. 414)

In fact the period was even harder for the novelists themselves to the degree that William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) says bitterly that America does not need a writer because it hasn't got a place for him. (Mendelssohn: 1989, 5) This criticism to the American institution by Faulkner who is considered as the father of the American novel should not be overlooked since a writer's suffering by extension denotes a social trend. Yet, writers tend to exploit their suffering into something useful for they can share their experience with others through creative writing as obvious in Steinbeck's case who succeeded in drawing with words one of the most honest pictures in the history of modern American novel.

The new land owners in *The Grapes of Wrath* have established a system that gives them control over the poor migrants. If any of them tried to say anything against their new order, they would label him a 'troublemaker'; a word signifying anti-Americanism. The proprietor of the camp says: "time's gonna come when we string 'em all up, all them troublemakers. We gonna run'em outa the country." (P.222) It is obvious that such remarks are due to the fact that those new opponents represent a direct threat to the interests of the Depression –profiteers. It is a question of wealth and ownership rather than casual quarrels made by those troublemakers. The migrants saw with their own eyes the

lifestyle of those who had benefited from these circumstances. Unlike the immigrants, these capitalists were the least to be affected by the stock crash market. This is why we find some characters like Tom become a sort of rebel against the established system. Not only this but in order to express his hatred for the capitalists he claims to be a 'bolshevisky,' while in fact he doesn't understand the meaning of the word. The novel shows the spiritual emptiness in which the greedy landowners live. A landowner is void inside, " if he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich. (P.225). These are Casy's words, the former preacher. Obviously, the migrants could neither give up hope, nor surrender to despair. Ma, who is holding the family up together, thinks that the future can be better. She cries "people is goin' on – changing, a little may be but goin' right on. (P.499). The migrants have experienced hunger which leads logically to anger and likely to result into a rebellion.

3.0.Results:

Firstly, John Steinbeck documents in this great novel a modern human tragedy in a realistic way. Secondly, the harsh criticism of capitalism offered by the novel is due to its 'social' realism and not to 'socialist' realism. Thirdly, the central characters grow and develop social awareness in times of disintegration and great suffering. Fourthly, the symbols used in the novel operate as imagery that give the overall content a touch of beauty and meaning. Last, but not least, man can learn from negative experiences positive meanings and values like the Joads who acquire their sense of social relatedness through suffering.

4.0. Conclusion:

One of the things that make *The Grapes of Wrath* a great American classic is the way in which Steinbeck, at one level of the story, creates characters that harshly judge and criticize capitalism but these characters are not conformists to the 'communist party'. The novel uses social realism to view these characters. Social realism is different from socialist realism which fosters political party-oriented literary works as in Russia. Characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* are only against social injustice, and they seek a useful way to achieve justice; that is why they succeed in organizing a strike without any intervention of any party-leaders.

In fact the central characters grow and learn from their experience. Tom promises to carry on Casy's mission, Casy himself dies for a fair cause for the sake of the group and Rose of Sharon shows human affinity by breastfeeding a starving man. Moreover, Ma Joad tells everyone to be considerate of the others. Thus, as emigrants moved west to California, their sense of love and solidarity for their fellows grow and become evident and inspiring. Steinbeck's success in depiction of this journey of suffering is matchless. His unique style of creating vivid pictures in the reader's mind through symbols and imagery testifies to his stature as a great modern novelist.

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