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The Spiritual Journey of the Joads
— A Thematic Study of *The Grapes of Wrath*

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ABSTRACT

John Steinbeck, whose masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* is both charming and complicated, is known as one of the most famous American novelists in the 20th century. When the novel was first published, it provoked a stir in American society and the readers. However, there always exist controversies towards the research of the novel in the academic circle, the focus of which lies in the structure and the themes of the novel, and the ideas of Steinbeck's creation. Since the 1980s, the research of the novel has covered more widely of thematic study, techniques and point of view. Professor Dong Hengxun has accumulated a great deal of achievements in exploring the themes of Steinbeck's novels and characterization.

Based on the previous researches on the themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*, this thesis studies the relationship between Steinbeck's creation and the American society in the 1930s, and then exposes this theme of the novel: the spiritual conversion of the Joads on their westward journey on the basis of the noble spirit the family are endowed with, that is, their conversion from an exclusive concern for family interests into a broader vision of caring for all oppressed people, taking the self as a member of the big family of the community.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In order to facilitate the analysis, it is necessary to talk about the background of Steinbeck's creation, and the first chapter gives a brief introduction to *The Grapes of Wrath*, including the story and the background of the novel, both economic and ecological: America economy was in great depression in the 1930s and workers were out of work, for many factories went bankrupt. Millions of farmers had to desert their homeland which had been turned to wasteland because of the drought and dust storms. The second chapter demonstrates the noble spiritual qualities the Joads are endowed with, consisting of the spirit of hard working with the family as a whole, the spirit of cooperation and the optimistic spirit. It is the noble spirit that helps them endure and prevail over the hardships and it is these noble spiritual qualities that ensure and motivate the spiritual conversion of the Joads. This chapter also exposes the spiritual

purpose of Steinbeck's creation of this novel: to arouse American people's perseverance in holding fast to the traditional noble spirit and to pull through the Great Depression together. The third chapter demonstrates the spiritual conversion of the Joads, from an exclusive concern for family interests into a broader vision of caring for all oppressed people. This chapter discusses respectively the conversions of Casy, Tom, Ma and Sharon. With the spiritual promotion and conversion, it is believed that people will accumulate more wealth and create the ideal life of future. The fourth chapter will analyze how Steinbeck makes use of symbolism and irony to strengthen the theme. The symbolic meaning of the dust, the turtle and the grapes are to be described in details.

Through the study of the theme of *The Grapes of Wrath*, not only our understanding of John Steinbeck and his works is enlarged, but also our perception of American society and traditional noble spiritual qualities is strengthened. Meanwhile, it also has strong relevance to our view of life: no matter what era we are in, no matter what kind of dilemmas we are confronting with, we should not become the victim of the disaster. Instead, we should keep persistent and optimistic so as to defend our living rights. At the same time, the power of the individual is limited when facing with difficulties. Only through cooperation with and caring for others can people create a brilliant life together.

Key Words: *The Grapes of Wrath*; The Joads; Noble Spirit; Spiritual Conversion

摘 要

约翰·斯坦贝克被公认为二十世纪美国文坛最伟大的小说家之一，其代表作《愤怒的葡萄》充满魅力，意蕴复杂。此书一经出版，便在当时的美国社会和读者中引起巨大反响。然而，学术界对该小说的研究一直存在很多争议，争议的焦点主要集中于小说的结构、主题以及作家斯坦贝克的创作思想。八十年代以来，学者对该著作的研究包含了更为广泛的主题、方法和视角。董衡巽教授针对斯坦贝克小说的主题和人物塑造方面做了大量研究。

本文是在借鉴前人关于主题研究成果的基础上来解读斯坦贝克的《愤怒的葡萄》的，旨在考察斯坦贝克的主题创作与二十世纪三十年代美国社会之间的关系，从而揭示小说的主题：乔德一家在固有的精神品质的基础上，在经历西迁过程中的种种磨难后，最终所产生的思想转变与精神升华，即从只关心小家庭利益到关爱所有受压迫人群，把自己看做是社会大家庭的一员。

本文共分为四章：为分析方便起见，有必要介绍解斯坦贝克创作该作品的背景，因而本文第一章将简单介绍《愤怒的葡萄》的故事情节以及当时美国的社会背景，包括经济背景和生态背景。二十世纪三十年代，美国在经济危机影响下大量工厂倒闭，工人失业，同时，由于长期遭受干旱和沙尘暴，美国万顷良田化为荒漠，无数农民背井离乡，流离失所。本文第二章论述了文章主角乔德一家固有的优良品质，包括注重家庭团结、艰苦奋斗精神、互助合作精神以及积极乐观的人生态度，而这些优良品质也正是乔德一家实现思想彻底转变的精神基础。这一章也揭示了斯坦贝克创造该小说的精神目的，即唤醒美国人民对传统优良品质的坚守，从而尽快共同度过社会大萧条的危机。第三章是本文重点，讲述了小说的主题，即乔德一家在经历从梦中天堂到人间低谷之后所产生的思想转变：从狭隘与自私，只关心一个独立小家庭的利益，到关心整个劳动阶层的利益，并把自己作为社会大家庭的一部分。而这种转变集中体现在四个人身上，分别是凯西、汤姆、母亲和妹妹罗撒香。精神升华与思想转变为他们积累物质财富，营造共同的美好生活，走向真正的幸福天堂埋下了伏笔；第四章探讨了《愤怒的葡萄》一文中作者是如何运用象征和讽刺手法来强化小说主题的，本章将具体描述最具象征意义的沙尘、乌龟和葡萄。

对《愤怒的葡萄》的主题进行深入学习与研究，不仅加深了我们对斯坦贝克及

其作品的理解，强化了我们美国社会及传统品质的认识，同时还对我们的人生观产生了深远的影响：无论何时，无论何地，不管遭遇多少艰难困苦，不管承受怎样的挫折打击，我们都不应该甘心沦为灾难的祭品，而是应充分发挥知难而进、坚忍不拔、积极乐观的精神，捍卫自己的生存权利。同时，在困境面前，一个人的力量是有限的，只有通过互助合作，关爱他人，才能共同营造未来美好的生活。

关键词：愤怒的葡萄；乔德一家；优良品质；思想转变

Introduction

John Ernst Steinbeck (1902-1968), born in Salinas, California and educated at Stanford University, is considered as one of the most prolific and most accomplished western American novelists in the 20th century. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962. During his lifetime Steinbeck produced more than thirty books, including novels, short stories, plays and journals. He creates works that stimulate the imagination, stir the readers' thoughts and emotions, and leave them with an awareness of life. Steinbeck's use of simple themes and his concern for common human values, combined with thoughtfulness, philosophical presence and humor, have appealed to a broad audience from every corner of the world.

Steinbeck's first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), romanticizes the life and exploits of the famous 17th-century Welsh pirate Sir Henry Moran. His two subsequent novels, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), a group of short stories depicting a community of California farmers, in which Steinbeck first dealt with the hardworking people and social themes associated with most of his works, and *To a God Unknown* (1933), the story of a farmer whose belief in a pagan fertility cult impels him, during a severe drought, to sacrifice his own life. In *The Pastures of Heaven*, he first introduced the regional folk material of his California wanderings, and when he used this again in *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a sympathetic portrayal of Americans of Mexican descent swelling near Monterey, California, he achieved a sudden fame that was to grow throughout the rest of the decade. *Of Mice and Men* (1937) is a tragic story of two farm laborers yearning for a small farm of their own. Besides *The Red Pony* in 1937, *The Long Valley* in 1938, and his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939, Steinbeck's other works include *The Moon Is Down* (1942), *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *The Pearl* (1947), *East of Eden* (1952), *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *America and Americans* (1966).

Among all Steinbeck's works, he is best remembered for *The Grapes of Wrath*, a genuine record of American society and history in the 1930s. It exerted a tremendous impact on American society when it was published in 1939, and its significance went far beyond the realm of literature. David Watt, a literary critic, once commented, "No American novel published in this century has aroused such a storm as *The Grapes of Wrath* did. One has to go back to Uncle Tom's Cabin to witness its equal" (Wyatt 2). Mainly because of this novel, John Steinbeck was elected to the National Institute of Arts and

Letters, and his name is recognized worldwide. In 1937 Steinbeck once joined one group of migrants from Oklahoma to California, living and working with them. He observed first-hand the living and working conditions of the migrants. He wrote, "I must go over into the interior valleys. There are five thousand families starving to death over there, not just hungry, but actually starving" (Covici 20). *The Grapes of Wrath* is thus a product of Steinbeck's won experience and direct observation. It is a story of the migration of agricultural workers from the dust bowl of Oklahoma to California, which is full of bitterness and pain but not exactly despair. Steinbeck gathered the country's recent shames and devastations, the desperate, dirty children, the dissolution of kin, the oppressive labor conditions in the Joad family who, like thousands of others, have traveled west in search of the promised land. Their story is one of false hopes, thwarted desires and broken dreams. Through their suffering Steinbeck creates a drama that is utterly human, but epic in its scale and scope. It is a moving tribute to the endurance and dignity of the human spirit. The novel helps in great measure toward increasing the nation's awareness of the seriousness of its problems.

Ever since its birth, *The Grapes of Wrath* has provoked loud and sustained responses and the critical opinion on it is surprisingly varied and contradictory. There are obviously two main bodies of opinion: one is that this is a vile, filthy book, an outsider's malicious attempt to smear the state of Oklahoma with outrageous lies; the other is that it is an honest, sympathetic and artistically powerful presentation of economic, social and human problems. It is generally believed that the criticism on this novel has undergone three periods of development. In the period from 1939 to the mid 1950s, critics tended to focus their attention on the novel's relationship with its historical and political background. Malcolm Cowley, a famous critic in the 1930s, claimed that "*The Grapes of Wrath* belongs very highly in the category of the great angry books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that had aroused the people to fight against the intolerable wrongs" (Mc Elrath 167). Frederic Carpenter published a critical essay named *The Philosophical Joads*, in which he contended, "For the first time in history, *The Grapes of Wrath* brings together and makes real three great skeins of American thought. It combines Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental over-soul, Whitman's mass democracy and William James' Pragmatism" (Bloom 15). Some other critics attacked this novel as radically subversive of capitalism and as arising out of his sympathy with the communist ideology. Edmund Wilson published in a New Public essay, "The California: Storm and Steinbeck." According to Wilson, "Steinbeck almost always in his fiction is dealing either with the lower animals or

with human beings so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level" (Edmund 42). In the second period from the mid 50s to the mid 1970s, scholars tended to regard it as a pure work of art. So these scholars mainly focused their research on the novel's structure, language, characters, plot, symbols, imagery and thoughts. Many of the critics contended that "*The Grapes of Wrath* is a great novel with superb characterization and moving plot", while some argued that "its structure is incoherent and its language is folksy" (Bloom 17). According to the critics of Mythic criticism, Steinbeck, through the use of myth and symbol, maintains that all life is holy, every creature valuable. J.P. Hunter, in the ending of *To the Grapes of Wrath*, demonstrated, "the Bible's three major symbols of a purified order are suggested: the Old Testament deluge, the New Testament stable, and the continuing ritual of communion" (David 7). After the writer's death, a great many full-length critical studies and collections of critical essays were published. Peter Lisca's influence was predominant in those publications. Steinbeck's non-teleological philosophy, as well as his characterization of men both as a religious creature and a biological being, or group animal, became one of the major critical considerations. In the light of this, Steinbeck's works are interpreted as explications of his philosophy, and myth, legend, and literary sources are seen as structuring devices for his novel. During the 1980s, there came a new trend of Steinbeck studies. Scholars have begun to approach Steinbeck's work from the perspectives of some contemporary critical theories, such as feminism, multiculturalism, ecological criticism and new historicism. Different theories of the research made various conclusions. Mimi Reisel Gladstein studied *The Grapes of Wrath* from Feministic approach. She illustrated that Steinbeck portrayed Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon as two indestructible women character in the novel. Louis Owens argued that "there is a close relationship between Steinbeck's literary creation and his home state California." He pointed out, "In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck rejects the myth of American West and exposes the California dream is not only illusory but also dangerous. Steinbeck's solution to this problem is a new ideal of commitment—the commitment to man and to place" (Bloom 115-127). Richard Hart analyzed Steinbeck's novel from ecological perspective. In 1977 he published an essay entitled *Steinbeck on Man and Nature: A Philosophical Reflection*, in which he claimed Steinbeck was a writer who thought as an ecologist. Hart pointed out that in this novel Steinbeck aimed to arouse American people's awareness to "preserve the ecological and natural integrity" (Beegel 43). In China, most literary critics pulled *The Grapes of Wrath* into social protest novel or proletarian novel for the political reasons before the year of 1980. Su Suocai and Dong Hengxun all contributed some

articles to analyze the novel on the basis of social criticism. As the authority of Steinbeck, Dong Hengxun's analysis on *The Grapes of Wrath* makes a representative of the tendency in Chinese literary field.

It can be found that critics still have different views on *The Grapes of Wrath* through the above review, and these controversies leave room for our further research and exploration. Many critics focused on thematic or technical concerns and no the characterizations of the Joads and the other migrants in the novel. Peter Lisca's 1958 *The Wild World of John Steinbeck*, Warren French's *John Steinbeck*, and Joseph Fontenrose's 1963 *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation*. These three critics in particular have demonstrated Steinbeck's interest in the human community. Based on the former researches, this thesis studies the American society in the 1930s, and then exposes the theme of the novel: the spiritual conversion of the Joads on their westward journey on the basis of the noble spirit the family are endowed with. The thesis is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter gives a brief introduction of *The Grapes of Wrath*, including the story and the background of the novel, such as economic background and ecological background. Writer's literary creation is based on his observation and interpretation of the social reality, thus we need to analyze the background for his composition of the work. It is known that the whole America economy was in great depression in 1930s and workers were out of work for many factories went bankrupt. Millions of farmers had to desert their homeland which had been turned to wasteland because of the drought and dust storms. Many American writers at that time converted their attention from individual to social problems, caring about the depression of the common public.

The second chapter demonstrates the noble spirit the Joads are endowed with. Steinbeck recorded his creative process in his working journals, "I must make a detailed description of the family I am going to write. We have to know these people, to know their looks and their nature. Make them live. But my people must be more than people. The Joads must be an over-essence of people" (DeMott 29). This indicated that the Joads would be endowed with some noble qualities. In the 1930s, many people became disillusioned and lost their self-confidence. Steinbeck witnessed the misery of ordinary people and realized what Americans badly needed at that moment was a spiritual remedy which could restore their confidence and give them hope. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck created the Joad family to use their story as an example to encourage the Depression era American readers. With Steinbeck's vivid and detailed depiction, the Joads are endowed with the

noble spirit of hardworking with the family as a whole, the spirit of cooperation and the optimistic spirit. It is the noble spirit that helps them endure and prevail over the hardships and it is the noble spirit that ensures and motivates the spiritual conversion of the Joads.

The third chapter is put into great emphasis. It demonstrates the spiritual conversion of the Joads, from the self-centered isolation to the involvement in the human community. If they want to survive the economic and spiritual challenge of their displacement, the Joads and the other migrants like them must abandon their former notions of concerning of their own benefits and move toward caring about others. After the westward journey, the Joads has obtained the education of the heart under great oppressions and has begun to care about all the migrants and regard themselves as a part of the whole human family instead of the individual loyalty to the isolated family. It is the capitalistic system that forces them to unite together. The Joads are not just the representative of the Dust Bowl migrants but of the injustice they are confronted with. Through an emphasis on the desperation of the individuals, the narrative suggests that only all the migrants unite can they regain their dignity in the society. The chapter has four branches, the conversion of Casy, Tom, Ma and Sharon. With the spiritual promotion and conversion, it is believed that people will accumulate more wealth and create the ideal life of future, finally provide the basis for the land of happiness.

The fourth chapter will analyze the devices of narration used in the novel to strengthen the theme, consisting of the use of symbolism and irony. The title of *The Grapes of Wrath* is closely related to the Bible, wherein the symbol of the "grapes" has frequent appearances. John Steinbeck takes use of the symbol of the "grapes" to extract from Western people's religious background various overlapping biblical images, thereby adds extra persuasive power to its themes. Besides, the symbolic dust and the turtle are also depicted in details. Consequently we should be aware of the importance of symbolism and irony as important techniques and pay great attention to it.

George Stevens has commented, "*The Grapes of Wrath* is worth all the anticipation. Here is the epitome of everything Steinbeck has so far given us. It has the humor and earthiness of *Tortilla Flat*, the social consciousness of *In Dubious Battle*, the passionate concern for the homeless and uprooted which made *Of Mice and Men* memorable. These elements, together with a narrative that moves with excitement for its own sake, are not mixed but fuse, to produce the unique quality of *The Grapes of Wrath* " (McElrath 158). *The Grapes of Wrath* is more than a period piece about a troubled past era; it is an allegory, applicable wherever prejudice and a sense of self-importance inhibit cooperation. Through

the study of the theme of *The Grapes of Wrath*, this thesis aims to give us a deep comprehension of John Steinbeck and his works, to help us to know more about American society, and the most importantly, to impact on our view of life: no matter what era we are in, no matter what kind of dilemma we are confronting with, we cannot become the victim of the disaster by fate, and we should live a wonderful life with the cooperation and care for all the human beings.

Chapter One A Brief Introduction to *The Grapes of Wrath*

Every writer's literary creation is based on his observation and interpretation of the social reality, thus we need to analyze the background for his composition of the work. John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* when most Americans were suffering from the devastating impact of the Great Depression. For the first time in history, Americans faced extreme poverty on a large scale because the situation was beyond any individual's control. Among all the sufferings of American people, the tragic plight of the Dust Bowl migrants caught Steinbeck's deep concern, providing rich materials for his composition of the novel.

1.1 The Story of *The Grapes of Wrath*

The Grapes of Wrath focuses on the Joad family of twelve—Grandpa, Grandma, Uncle John, Pa Joad, Ma Joad, Noah, Tom Joad, Al, Rose of Sharon, her husband Connie, Winfield, Ruthie, joined by Jim Casy. It tells a story of the Joad family, featuring the hardship and oppression suffered by migrant laborers during the Great Depression. The novel is divided neatly into three parts: the Joads' time in Oklahoma, the journey to California and their experiences in the Golden State. It begins with the description of the conditions in the Dust Bowl Oklahoma where crops and instigated massive foreclosures on farmland are ruined.

Tom Joad, a man less than thirty, makes his way back to his family's farm in Oklahoma when he is released from an Oklahoma state prison after serving four years for a homicide conviction. On his way home, he meets Jim Casy, a former preacher who has given up his belief. Jim accompanies Tom to his home and they find that all the farmlands are deserted. Muley Graves, an elderly tenant farmer, wanders by and tells them that most families have headed to California to look for work, including the Joads who have gone to Uncle John's house preparatory to going west. Once they arrived, Tom finds Ma and Pa Joad packing up the family's possessions. Because of land banks, weather, and machine farming, farmers who are no longer able to make a living have been forced out of the farms they have tenanted and have begun their journey towards California, the Promised Land.

Like thousands of others, the Joads along with Jim Casy begins their journey to California in a worn-out truck. Grandpa Joad, who complains bitterly, hat he does not want

to leave his land, dies of a stroke on the road immediately after the family's departure. The entire country seems to be in flight to the Promised Land of California. In the journey, the Joads meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple plagued with car trouble, and invite them to travel with the family. However, Sairy Wilson is sick and becomes unable to continue the journey near the California border. When the Joads come near California, they hear ominous rumors of a depleted job market. One migrant tells that two thousand people show up for every eight hundred jobs and that his own children have starved to death. The Joads' first days in California prove to be tragic, for Grandma dies. The remaining family members move from one sordid camp to another, looking in vain for work, struggling to find food, and trying desperately to hold their family together. Noah, the oldest of the Joad children, soon abandons the family, as does Connie, the husband of Rose of Sharon, Tom's sister.

While they are in California, the family confront with much hostility. Overcrowded and starving, migrants in the camps are nasty to each other. The locals are fearful and angry at the flood of newcomers, whom they derisively label "Okies." Work is almost impossible to find or pays such a meager wage that a family's full day's work cannot buy a decent meal. Fearing an uprising, the large landowners do everything in their power to keep the migrants as poor and dependent as they can. While staying in a ramshackle camp known as a "Hooverville," Tom and several men get into a heated argument with a deputy sheriff over whether workers should organize into a union. When the argument turns violent, Jim Casy knocks the sheriff unconscious and is arrested. Police officers arrive and announce their intention to burn the Hooverville to the ground. A government-run camp proves much more hospitable to the Joads, and the family soon finds many friends and a bit of work. However, one day, while working at a pipe-laying job, Tom learns that the police are planning to stage a riot in the camp, which will allow them to shut down the facilities. By alerting and organizing the men in the camp, Tom helps to defuse the danger. Still, as pleasant as life in the government camp is, the Joads cannot survive without steady work, and they have to move on. They find employment picking fruit, but soon learn that they are earning a decent wage only because they have been hired to break a workers' strike. Tom runs into Jim Casy who, after being released from jail, has begun organizing workers; in the process, Casy has made many enemies among the landowners. When the police hunt him down and kill him in Tom's presence, Tom retaliates and kills a police officer. Tom goes into hiding, while the family moves into a boxcar on a cotton farm. One day, Ruthie, the youngest Joad daughter, reveals to a girl in the camp that her brother has killed two

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

1.2 The Background of the Novel

1.2.1 Economic Background

Economic crisis appears so frequently in America, but none of them can compare with the crisis of 1930s, which is called Great Depression (1929-1939). *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the representative fictions of this period. It caused innumerable unemployment and bankrupts and symbolized the first time that Americans faced extreme poverty on a large scale because of circumstances beyond any individual's control. As the gap between the poor and the rich increased, discontent and threatened strikes also increased. It was all part of the generalized national situation which culminated in the stock market crash of 1929 and the depression period following. The number of unemployment increased from 1,500,000 to 15,000,000 from the year 1929 to 1932 in America. The mass production, the great surplus of labor force and the low purchasing power all led to the surplus of merchandise and the increase of the price. The price of agriculture product slumped 53% in the first four years of the crisis and it brought out three dire straits: big companies possessing large tract of land continued to rent land to the small farmers getting no profit; small landholders had to go bankrupt; the farmers became unemployed, for they were driven by the tractor:

Prior to 1820 the smallest acreage which the settler could buy from the United States Government was 320, which had to be paid for at the rate of two dollars an acre and in four years. Subsequent to 1820, however, the Government policy changed, and it became possible to buy lots of as little as eighty acres, and after the Civil War the policy was further modified and settlers were able to take up these small farms for nothing. An eighty-acre

farm is uneconomic without highly developed local markets and without very skilful farming; the Middle West never developed any sort of regional economy and even the smallest farmers went in for wheat as a main crop. The result was that the farmers were wholly at the mercy of world prices without local standbys, and the consequence of the unending cropping of wheat was soil exhaustion (McElrath 180).

A succession of drought years accelerated the slow draining of the fertility of the soil, and the top soil began to break up into dust and to blow away. The farmers fell in debt and failed to keep up the payments on their mortgages and the farms were taken over by the banks finally. "By 1935 the great wave of dust bowl migration was displacing many, though by no means all, of the immigrant, non-white laborers in California fields. From 1935 to 1938, between 300,000 and 500,000 Okies arrived in California. Poverty, land foreclosures and drought had forced them out of Lower Plains states such as Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and of course, Oklahoma" (Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to The Grapes of Wrath* 11).

Millions of people were driven out of their home and their households were uprooted from the soil, robbed of their possessions, though by strictly legal methods. A large number of people have been rolling westward, carrying all they have in perilous cars, with children riding on top of the tents and the blankets and the cooking pots, their desperate elders hanging on wherever they can. Friendless and homeless, they have wandered in search of a few days' work at miserable wages. In the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck gives an exhaustive description of such a migration:

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs near to the shelter and to water. And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there (Steinbeck 264).

As John Steinbeck depicts:

The moving, questing people were migrants now. Those families which had lived on a little piece of land, who had lived and died on forty acres, had now the whole West to rove in. And they scampered about, looking for work; and the highways were streams of people, and the ditch banks were lines of people. Behind them more were coming. The

great highways streamed with moving people... And the migrants streamed in on the highways and their hunger was in their eyes, and their need was in their eyes. They had no arguments, no system, nothing but their numbers and their needs. When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it—fought with a low wage. If that man will work for thirty cents, I'll work for twenty-five (Steinbeck 385).

The American government had taken great efforts to fight against this crisis, but their hope that the Depression could be limited was destroyed. The starving people lost their faith in American government and economic system, for the closed-down banks destroyed the savings of millions of depositors, it seems that the leader of American government had no capacity of tackling this economic disaster, they exhibited their hatred through strikes, petition, demonstrations. In 1932, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt won the presidential election. In order to achieve the restoration of the American economy, he raised a series of reforming plans to restore the industry and agriculture. Although many conservatives continued to threaten and oppose the implementing his great measures, thinking that they having the tendency of socialism, President Roosevelt won the support of the people and ensured to lead the American people to go through the predicament of American history. Unemployment and poverty became the most pressing social problem in the Great Depression.

1.2.2 Ecological Background

As a result of years of misuses of land and sustained drought, in the 1930s a human disaster called The Dust Bowl took place in the southwestern Great Plains region of the United States, including parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. Before farmers came the region was covered by hardy grasses that held the soil in place in spite of the long recurrent droughts and occasional torrential rains characteristic of the period. However, in the thirty years before World War I, a large number of homesteaders settled in the region, planting wheat and row crops and raising cattle. Both these land uses left the soil exposed to the danger of erosion by the winds that constantly sweep over the area. Beginning in the early thirties, the region suffered a period of severe droughts, and the soil began to blow away. The organic matter, clay, and silt in the soil were carried great distances by the winds, in some areas darkening the sky as far as the Atlantic coast, and sand and heavier materials drifted against houses, fences, and barns. In many places eight to ten centimeters of soil were blown away. Millions of hectares of farmland became useless, and thousands of people were forced to leave their homes. The Dust Bowl lasted

about a decade. It was full of extremes including blizzards, tornadoes, floods, droughts, and dirt storms. For those who have never visited the dust bowl or experienced a dust storm it will be of interest to quote briefly from one of a series of *Letters from the Dust Bowl* written during the summer of 1935 by Mrs. Henderson speaks first to her friend "Evelyn" of the startling "transition from rain-soaked eastern Kansas with its green pastures, luxuriant foliage, abundance of flowers, and promise of a generous harvest, to the dust-covered desolation of No Man's Land" (Ma 21). She describes their present conditions:

wearing our shade hats, with handkerchiefs tied over our faces, we have been trying to rescue our home from the accumulations of wind-blown dust which penetrates wherever air can go. It is an almost hopeless task, for there is rarely a day when at a time the dust clouds do not roll over. Visibility approaches zero and everything is covered again with silt like deposit which may vary in depth from a film to actual ripples on the kitchen floor. I keep oiled clothes on the window sills and between the upper and lower sashes (Ibid 21).

Mrs. Henderson also remarks with sympathy, incidentally, on the number of families who have been forced out of area, describing the "pitiful reminders of broken hopes and apparently wasted effort" she encountered driving through the countryside. "Little abandoned homes where people had drilled deep wells for the precious water, had set trees and vines, built reservoirs, and fenced in gardens, with everything now walled in or buried by banks of drifted soil—told a painful story of loss and disappointment" (Ibid. 21-22).

The Dust Bowl has destroyed the living hope of people in the Great Plains during the Great Depression. They could no longer enjoy each bit of happiness of life. The northern plains were not so badly affected, but nonetheless, the drought, windblown dust and agricultural decline were no strangers to the north. In fact, the agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Depression whose effects were felt worldwide. The movement of people on the Plains was also profound. As John Steinbeck wrote in his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*:

And then the dispossessed were drawn west—from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas, families, tribes, dusted out, tracted out. Car-loads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do—to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids were hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land (Steinbeck 317).

Beginning in 1935 intensive efforts were made both by federal and state

governments to develop adequate programs for soil conservation and for rehabilitation of the Dust Bowl. The measures taken have included seeding large areas in grass; three year rotation of wheat, sorghum, and of lying fallow; the introduction of counter plowing, terracing, and strip planting; and in areas of greater rainfall, the planting of long shelter belts of trees to break the force of wind.

Chapter Two The Noble Spirit the Joads are Endowed with

In the 1930s, when more than a half million Dust Bowl migrants moved to California for survival, what they are faced with was not a Promised Land but a land of depression. They fight against the discrimination, poverty and homelessness. Besides those migrants, numerous Americans also suffered a lot in the Great Depression. Many people became disillusioned and lost their self-confidence. Steinbeck witnessed the misery of ordinary people and expressed his deep sympathy. In his opinion, what Americans badly needed at that moment was a spiritual remedy which could restore their confidence and give them hope. At that time an intellectual movement named the Literary Rediscovery of America was under its way in the United States. Some American writers began to emphasize the importance to rediscover the national merits in the Great Depression. They praised the country's glorious past and explored those noble spirits which had helped build the nation in their literary works. John Steinbeck completed *The Grapes of Wrath* in such an atmosphere. He firmly believed that the noble spirit would help people overcome hardships in the Great Depression. And his idea was clearly summarized in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech: "The writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation" (Steinbeck, Nobel Acceptance Speech 1962).

Besides, Steinbeck, by depicting the noble spirit of the Joads, aimed to change the public's negative perception of the Dust Bowl migrants and to increase their sympathy for those poor homeless people. In the 1930s, more than a half million Dust Bowl migrants swarmed into California and Californians felt greatly threatened by those impoverished people. They perceived the migrants as radicals who were fertile soil for crimes. In addition, the migrants were described as ignorant, immoral and even subhuman people, whose values and life style were antithetical to those of local people. Consequently many people urged the local government to take harsh measures against the migrants as a result of the discrimination and prejudice. However, through Steinbeck's direct contact with those migrants, he found that local people had misunderstood the migrants. Actually they were optimistic, cooperative, cherishing the unity of family and hard working. Before they went to California, they were self-sustaining farmers, maintaining the traditional American

cultural values. In order to change public's negative perception of the migrants and arouse their sympathy, John Steinbeck took numerous efforts to depict the noble spirit of the Dust Bowl migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck tried to answer what kind of noble spirit Americans should embrace in a time of social crisis. In order to glorify the noble spirit, Steinbeck created the Joad family in the novel and made a very detailed depiction of their journey to the west because he wanted to use the Joads' story as an example to encourage the Depression era American readers. He recorded his admiration for the Joads' spirit that he created, "The theme of the novel is mighty. I grow again to love the story which is so much greater than I am. To love and admire the people who are so much stronger and purer and braver than I am" (DeMott 36). This indicated that the Joads would be endowed with some noble qualities. With Steinbeck's vivid and detailed depiction, the Joads are endowed with the noble spirit of hardworking with the family as a whole, the spirit of cooperation and the optimistic spirit. It is the noble spirit that helps them endure and prevail over the hardships and it is the noble spirit that ensures and motivates the spiritual conversion of the Joads.

2.1 The Spirit of Hard Working with the Family as a Whole

As Lillian Schlissel, an American historian, demonstrated, "In terms of westward migration, family played a special role. It was the only institution that could be entrusted with the enterprise of settling the continent" (Luedtke 81). During the early 1930s, severe drought and sandstorms frequently harass the Great Plain where they inhabit. The family suffers huge losses in this natural disaster and becomes unable to pay a debt. Like many other Dust Bowl farmers, the Joads are forced to leave their land which has been mortgaged to the bank. With no choice, they decide to migrate to California for a better life. Like millions of others, the Joads have little association with town or city, and have to solve all the problems without outside aid. They plant their own crops, cook their food and make their own clothes. It is common that all the migrants' families are constantly faced with circumstances under which they can rely upon no one but themselves to confront with all the hardships. They solve their problems not only by maintaining the family unity, but also displaying the value of hardworking.

The Joads hold a family conference to discuss whether they should migrate west, which reflects their spirit of cherishing the opinions and the importance of each family

member. Grandpa chairs the meeting, and Pa Joad reports the family's financial situation and outlines his plan for the journey. Each family member expresses his opinion on the problem. They also hold a discussion when Tom puts a proposal to take Casy to go with them and they finally reach an agreement on this. Each person participates in the decision making and contributes his wisdom to the migration in the process.

When preparing for the journey, the family labors are quickly divided into different duties of work. Pa Joad and his sons go to the town and trade their farm implements for an old truck that will carry them and their meager possessions to California. Ma Joad and her daughters are preoccupied by preparing the clothes, food and kitchen utensils for their migration. Pa and his elder sons slaughter two pigs. Ma and her daughters salt the meat for food on the trek. Ma sorts through their remaining possessions and determines what could or could not be taken. Pa and the adult sons pack the necessary belonging on the truck. Their preparation for the journey is highly efficient with the effort of the whole family. The Joads have a realistic attitude toward life. They judge things as what they really are, instead of letting their preconceived notions tell them. The Joads are flexible and are ready to change according to the environment. Once the family starts the journey, they quickly transform their status from farmers into migrants and the truck becomes their temporary home. The family understands that the long journey to California is not easy. They have to cross the Rocky Mountain and a desert, so the unity of family is quite important. For the Joads, family is a group that can provide them with security and livelihood. Each family member has responsibility for the well-being of the family as a whole. On their westward trek, Ma Joad points out an unshakable determination to preserve the integrity of family. She says, "All we got in the family unbroken. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see up bust up" (Steinbeck 231). By exercising each family members' effort, the Joads overcome all kinds of obstacles. Tom and Al drive the truck alternately and repair it when it does not work, because no other people can do the job. Ma and her elder daughter Rose take care of grandparents and children, and cook food for the whole family when they make stops at the roadside. Finally, they cross the desert smoothly and get to California because of everyone's effort. After the Joads arrive in California, they are exhausted and penniless. They have to find a refuge in a government camp which provides the basic living facilities to migrants. Here the Joads get a chance to recuperate from their exhaustion, but they have a strong faith in hard-working instead of being relief dependents.

Once they make a recovery, they leave the government camp and travel around the California countryside searching for work. They are employed as temporary farm laborers, and the wage is so low that the income of a whole family's work from morning to evening can not buy enough food, but the Joads confidently believed that hard working would eventually help them overcome all troubles. All they want is a chance to work and a home of their own.

The Joads' spirit of hard working with the family as a whole gives them dignity and helps them survive in the harsh economic condition. By depicting the Joads' spirit of hard working, Steinbeck intended to change the readers' negative perception of the Dust Bowl migrants as lazy and welfare dependents, just as what Steinbeck has said, "They are of the best stock, intelligent, resourceful; and if given a chance, socially responsible" (Wollenberg 62). What the readers saw in this novel were hard working families under economic depression and natural disasters. John Steinbeck's creation of this noble spirit is very essential for the American people in the Depression era. People should think and behave like the Joads in order to survive in such a hard time.

2.2 The Spirit of Cooperation

In the journey of the Joads' westward migration, they not only display the spirit of hard working of the respective families, but also demonstrate the spirit of cooperation, which plays a crucial role for their survival in the harsh times. In the process of the westward journey, the Joads conveys the willingness of mutual assistance and joint efforts. As the conditions are extremely poor on the way to the west and the journey is full of hardships and danger, migrants have sympathy toward each other. As a result, when one is in need of help, others will be ready and happy to offer whatever help he is able to render.

The spirit of cooperation is greatly glorified in *The Grapes of Wrath*. John Steinbeck describes the mutual assistance between the Joads and the Wilson family on their trek to the west. At a road side camp, the Joads meet the Wilsons who are also Dust Bowl migrants to California, so the two families decide to travel together, relying on their joint effort and the security members. When Grandpa Joad becomes deadly ill, the Wilsons offer their tent to the old man. When he dies of a stroke later, they help the Joads bury the old man in an unmarked grave. The Joads also offer aid to the Wilsons if they meet hardships. When the Wilsons' vehicle is broken, Tom Joad and Al Joad try their best to help the

family fix it. Before they cross the desert, the Wilsons announce their inability to go on, because Sairy Wilson's weakness from cancer has overtaken her, and she is too sick to travel any further. To help the Wilsons alleviate the trouble, the Joads leave most of their cash and the rest of their food for them. Cooperation not only exists between the Joads and the Wilsons, but also among other Dust Bowl migrants. Steinbeck vividly recreated this pioneer virtue to readers:

In the daylight they took the migrant way to the West. 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. They huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food and the things they hoped for in the new country (Steinbeck 264).

John Steinbeck elevates the Joads' spirit of cooperation to a higher level after they arrive in California. While they wander through the orchards of the central valley, experiencing the miserable life with other migrant families, the Joads realize that their plight is somehow universal and mutual assistance is very crucial for poor people during the Great Depression. As a result, they begin to extend the principle of cooperation beyond their neighbors to embrace everyone they meet. This concept is well reflected in Ma Joad's conversation with a woman whom Ma thanks for help during Rose's childbirth. She says, "In the economic depression, everybody is in the same wagon. Used to be the family was the first. It isn't now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (Steinbeck 606). Under the guidance of this concept, the Joads provide aid to those in troubles and also get others' help. At a road side squatter's camp, when several starving children watch Ma Joad prepare food for her family, Ma leaves some portion of food for them, although her family members are also very hungry. At the end of the novel, the Joads lose nearly all their possession in a winter flood, but Ma's daughter, Rose of Sharon, who is sick from childbirth, still offers her milk to save a starving stranger. Rose's benevolent and selfless deeds demonstrated that she has taken the mutual assistance and joint efforts as a life value. Obviously John Steinbeck created this plot intentionally so as to emphasize the importance of the spirit of cooperation in the Great Depression.

John Steinbeck believes that Americans not only need to learn how to compete with each other, but also need to learn how to live with each other in a harmony. Although people were interdependent on each other, in an economic crisis like Great Depression, cooperation could help them overcome those hardships which were overwhelming to

individuals. He also conveys to the readers that the Dust Bowl migrants were not the immoral bums perceived by many Californians, but were some noble people whose spirit of cooperation should be respected by each person.

2.3 The Optimistic Spirit

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the optimistic spirit is reflected in the deep heart of the characters. California offers a chance for those who are dispossessed of their lands. The Joads regard California as a land of rebirth, a fantastic Eden to realize their dreaming life. Although the westward journey is full of hardships and struggle, the Joads have optimistic view on their migration. They believe that through a personal effort any obstacles can be conquered and their future in California must be bright.

The goal of the Joads' westward migration to California is for a better life, just like millions of others. Although they lose their farmland and are forced to leave Oklahoma because of sandstorms and economic depression, the Joads are optimistic about the future. They conceive California as a Promised Land which can give them a home and good jobs. Before the Joads start their westward journey, Ma expresses her optimistic expectation for this migration: "But I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever' place, an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses among the orange trees. I wonder - that is, if we all get jobs and all work - maybe we can get one of those little white houses" (Steinbeck 124). However, there is a sharp contrast between their plan and the harsh reality. Their dream turns into a nightmare. After the Joads begin their long trek, they witness deaths and departures of the family members. Grandpa and grandma die from the tiredness of the trip. Noah Joad, the oldest son deserts the family. Rose of Sharon, the pregnant lady, is abandoned by her husband Connie, and her baby is born dead. In California, Jim Casy is killed by a vigilante group and Tom Joad becomes a fugitive. What the Joads face in California is a labor surplus in the job market and the hostile community. They find hundreds of thousands of roaming and desperate migrant workers like themselves in the state. They suffer from starvation, homelessness, exploitation and discrimination. The Joads are so optimistic that they are ready to change their mind according to different circumstances. This attitude facilitates their adjustment to the new situation. Despite all these overwhelming miseries, Ma Joad is an optimistic character with indomitable fortitude and courage. It is Ma who constantly encourages her family to overcome hardships. Steinbeck depicted Ma Joad as a citadel of the family, a

symbol of hope and continuity. She is endowed with the traits of optimistic woman, providing both material and spiritual nourishment to the family. Before the family start their journey, Al Joad asks Ma whether she worries about the new life in California, Ma replies, "A little. But I'm not scared so much. When something happens, I get to do something - I'll do it" (Steinbeck 168). Ma knows that once they start their westward migration, their primary concern is how to survive in a new environment, so they must be optimistic. After the Joads get to California, they start to realize their dream for a better life is just a falsified illusion. Among family members, only Tom finds a job which lasts just five days. Other men remain unemployed and become dismayed. However, Ma does not lose her morale. She encourages them to go on finding jobs. She says, "You don't get the right to be discouraged. This here the family is going under. You just don't get the right" (Steinbeck 479). Under Ma's guidance, the Joads continue to search for work in California's countryside. They work as temporary farm laborers, picking fruits and cotton. Soon the harvest season comes to its end, which means no works for several months. When Pa Joad expresses his anxiety and sees no hope for the future, Ma encourages him that they will overcome the obstacles as long as they make the greatest effort. She believes that life will go on if they work out a solution to the daily issue and there is no need to worry about the future problems. Ma expresses her optimistic attitude toward life in a conversation with her husband: "We aren't going to die out. People are going on - changing a little, maybe, but going right on. Everything we do - seems to me is aimed right at going on. It seems that way to me. Even getting hungry - even being sick; someone dies, but the rest is tougher. Just try to live the day, just the day" (Steinbeck 577). Another example is Ma Joad's reaction to grandma's death. While the Joads are crossing the desert at night, grandma dies from the stress of the trip. Only Ma knows this, but she does not tell anybody, because she fears it would distract the family's attention to cross the desert. She spends the whole night with the old woman's corpse. After they have crossed the desert and arrive in California, she tells her family what has happened. Under the instruction of these encouraging words, Ma Joad illuminates her family to triumph over their difficulties and survive in the Great Depression. She speaks for no particular class but for all human beings.

John Steinbeck portrays the optimistic spirit to assure the American readers that life would go on only if they remain strong and determined. It is the belief in the inevitable triumph of people over disasters. It is the celebration of the endurance of the common people.

Chapter Three The Spiritual Conversion after the Journey

--- From Self-centered Isolation to Involvement in Community

During the process of the journey, the Joads also grow gradually up to the spiritual maturity. As Warren French has said, "It is not about the family's sad adventure; it is about their education, the completion of which is shown in the final scene. What 'education'? — The education of the heart" (French *John Steinbeck* 89).

The Grapes of Wrath is a bitter journey of poor farmers from the dusty plains Oklahoma to California. Unfortunately, the Joads almost lost all their small possession, found hardly any job, suffered the death of the family members, and finally bore a stillborn child. However, there are various help from the same dispossessed when they confront with oppression and exploitation. There are so many examples of caring for others that the concept of "We" appears steadily, just as John Steinbeck has stated:

One man, one family driven from the land. I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in a ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here 'I lost land' is changed; a cell is split and from the splitting grows the thing you hate—'We lost our land.' The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first 'we' there grows a still more dangerous thing: 'I have a little food plus I have none.' If from this problem the sum is 'We have a little food,' the thing is on its way, the movement has direction. Only a little multiplication now, and this land, this tractor are ours. The two men squatting in a ditch, the little fire, the side-meat stewing in a single pot, the silent, stone-eyed women; behind, the children listening with their souls to words their minds do not understand. The night draws down. The baby has a cold. Here, take this blanket. It is wool. It was my mother's blanket — take it for the baby. This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning—from 'I' to 'we' (Steinbeck 206).

It is a process of people in the struggle of survival growing out of individual and family benefits towards that of all the people around them. This is also the best way for them to survive. If they want to survive the economic and spiritual challenge of their displacement, the Joads and the other migrants like them must abandon their former

notions of concerning of their own benefits and move toward caring about others. It is the capitalistic system that forces them to unite together. It is crucial that they as individuals and as a family unit confront the challenge of the transformation from self-centered isolation to involvement in community in terms of the emotional logic and ethic that characterized their everyday life in Oklahoma. After the westward journey, the Joads has obtained the education of the heart under great oppressions and has begun to care about all the migrants and regard themselves as a part of the whole human family instead of the individual loyalty to the isolated family. The Joads are not just the representative of the Dust Bowl migrants but of the injustice they are confronted with. Through an emphasis on the desperation of the individuals, the narrative suggests that only all the migrants unite can they regain their dignity in the society. There are two levels of connotation of the perception from "I" to "we". The first one is the intention of helping others, of sharing foods, and of human sympathy for fellows, that is to say, the conversion from the boundary of individual to group. The second level is the fight for the justice cause by cooperation, or the revolutionary participation against oppression. Both of the levels lead to break through the confinement of the individual and to enlarge the love and care for others. With the spiritual promotion and conversion, it is believed that people will accumulate more wealth and create the ideal life of future, finally provide the basis for the land of happiness. Thus for the Joads, the journey westward is also a journey from the personal concern to a larger concern for all humanity. It is the theme of spiritual conversion from "I" to "we" that make the book viable as the great literature of today's relevance.

3.1 Casy's Conversion

The famous Steinbeck critic Warren French asserts, "Casy serves as the vehicle for the transformation of Tom Joad from a selfish, violent individual concerned only with the survival of his touchy clan into a visionary operating selflessly in the background as an inspiring influence to his whole community" (French *John Steinbeck's Fiction Revisited* 76). Actually Jim Casy influences not only Tom Joad, but also other members of the family. He is the spokesman for the conversion from the self-centered isolation to the involvement in community and assumes a degree of leadership in it before he dies.

We first see Jim Casy at the beginning of the novel, when Tom Joad hitchhiked home from prison releasing after serving four years of a seven-year sentence for homicide. In the introductory scene with Tom Joad, Tom and Jim recall the old days when Casy

preached the old religion, expounded the old concept of in and guilt. Now, however, Casy has already abandoned his conventional notions of sin, hellfire, and the salvation of individual souls for the doctrine of universal love. He explains his ejection of a religion through which he saw himself as wicked and depraved because of the satisfaction of natural desires. Casy tells Tom, "I was a preacher, 'Reverend Jim Casy—was a Burning Busher. Used to howl out the name of Jesus to glory. And used to get an irrigation ditch so squirmin' full of repented sinners half of 'em like to drowned. But not no more" (Steinbeck 27).

The conversion of Jim Casy is completed gradually. From the moment he reveals that he is not preaching anymore, Jim Casy transforms from an ex-preacher to a man of the human beings. Before leaving Oklahoma, Casy already has a brief glimpse of unity: "Maybe all men got one big soul everybody's a part of" (Steinbeck 33). He has abandoned his restrictive preaching. He has, as he says, forsaken the Holy Spirit for the human spirit. Realizing that the praying cannot save the distressed people, Casy abandons his social views as a preacher and creates significant relationships with the world outside. Not only does his understanding of man and the world promote a sense of connection with nature, but more importantly, it promotes a sense of connections with all of mankind suppressed. Although he has already meditated on the idea of one human family, he cannot formulate his concept that "maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit—the human sperit—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever' body' a part of." because he think that "fella gets use'to a way of thinking, it's hard to leave" (Steinbeck 33). When he finds confirmation of his theory in the observation of Muley Graves, who will not leave his land, that "If a fella's got something to eat an' another fella's hungry—why, the first fella ain't got no choice," Casy feels obliged to say, "Muley's got a-holt of somepin, an' it's too big for him, an' it's too big for me." He is able to articulate his new version, however, when he replies to Ma Joad's dogma that cutting pork is women's work, "It's all work... They's too much of it to split up to men's or women's work."

In chapter four of the novel, Casy discovers within himself a commitment to all mankind, when Casy explain his new philosophy of life to Tom Joad, he says, "I got the call to lead the people" (Steinbeck 29). During the long trek to California, Casy accompanies the Joads because he wants to be with people and help them, although he does not know how he can act usefully on their behalf. So the strong basis upon which his philosophy is based is his commitment to mankind and love of all the people. He tells Tom:

"I says: 'What's this call, this sperit?' An'I says 'It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust, sometimes'. An'I says: 'I don't know nobody name' Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people.'" (Steinbeck 32). Casy's strong love of people and concerning of mankind is embodied in his commitment to help the Joads when he gives himself up to the Deputies at the Hooverville in order to protect Tom from being arrested. It will be a disaster for the latter to go prison because of having broken the parole. It is not until Casy was put in prison after he sacrificed himself for Tom that he is able to come to a full understanding of his views. It is in prison that he sees the advantage of men organizing and working together to achieve some goal and it is in prison that he learns that man's spiritual unit must express itself in a social unity, which is why he becomes an organizer of workers' union. His doctrine has taken complete shape, and his mission has become the organizing of farm workers into unions. He leaves the prison and tries to put his thoughts and ideas into action. But he arouses the antagonism of the people in authority. Then he was brutally slain by one of the assassins. He finally sacrifices himself for others. Casy's last words to the men who are attacking him are: "You fellas don' know what you're doin'... You don't know what you're a-doing" (Steinbeck 527). But his remark is not that they do not know who they are killing, but that they are starving kids, a basic concern of the common people. The grace that he reluctantly gives over his first breakfast with the Joads is already manifesting every essence of the main theme of *The Grapes of Wrath*:

An' I got thinkin', on'y it wasn't thinkin', it was deeper down than thinkin'. I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' makin' was holy when it was one thing an' it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy (Steinbeck 110).

His conversion is complete and extends beyond his death. He has changed his loyalty to the spirit of man and that spirit will endure. It is Jim Casy's concerning of all mankind and self-sacrifice that must be learned by all of us, if we want to create a beautiful future.

3.2 Tom's Conversion

Tom Joad, the protagonist in *The Grapes of Wrath*, also experiences a conversion and he is reborn in this novel. "He is reborn as a new kind of leader who, like Casy, is committed to the people as a whole and to the place these people inhabit now, be it good or bad"(Owens 139).

As Tom first appears from the prison, he is interested only in his own personal comforts and wants. He feels no guilt or shame about having killed a man and under the same circumstances would do it again. Tom does not regret that the man was dead, but he feels he was only defending himself. When Casy observes so many people are moving like a whole country is moving, he talks to Tom his worry: "suppose all these here folks an'ever'body-s'pose they can't get no jobs out there?" Tom cries, "How'd I know? I'm jus'puttin one foot in front of the other. I done it at Mac for four years, just marchin'in cell an'out cell an'in mess an'out mess. Jesus Christ, I thought it'd be somepin different when I come out! Couldn' think a nothin'in there, else you go stir happy, an'now can't think a nothin'." (Steinbeck 126) When Jim talks about the present situation and prophets that "They's gonna come a thing that's gonna change the whole country", Tom replies, "I'm still layin' my dogs down one at a time," While Jim says, "but when a fence comes up at you, ya gonna climb that fence," Tom declares "I climb fences when I got fences to climb." (Steinbeck 126) In chapter twenty-six, when Casy, now a labor organizer, pleads with Tom to support a trike against the ranch, Tom replies, "Pa wouldn't do it... He'd say it wasn't none of his business... Tonight we had meat. Not much, but we had it. Think Pa's gonna give up his meat on account a other fellas?" (Steinbeck 524). In fact, Tom refuses his request and the Joads are unwitting strikebreakers. These examples demonstrate that what Tom cares about is just his family.

It is until in the Weedpatch camp that Tom begins to accept Casy's ideas and to act it out. In the camp, Tom joins a committee to prevent hooligans from the Cattle and Growers Associations from starting a riot at the Saturday night dance. With the show of force the committee escorts the troublemakers out of camp without hurting them. Tom gains from the experience the good sense that, even outside of prison, there can be dignity in a nonviolent approach to people who would put him down, that by uniting individual forces, there is hope for betterment of his family and his fellowmen. Besides direct threat to his person, what rouses Tom the most is the fact that law has become a tool of the Association of Farmers. He assures Ma more than once that he is not a Floyd who attacks society out of personal bitterness and of his violent character. He explains: "If it was the law they was workin' with, why, we could take it. But it ain't the law. They're a workin' away at our spirits... tryin' to break us" (Steinbeck 522). He carries that attitude to Hooper Ranch—a false Eden that the Joads enter for work picking peaches, ignorant that they are actually strike-breakers. The orchard is virtually a prison for guards forbid any worker to go outside the plantation and cut off every connection. Tom wants to get outside to discover what is

going on. Neither Pa nor Al will go with him, so he tries alone. An armed guard challenges him. Tom backs away. But he does not whine. In reflection of the Weedpatch strategy, he remains cool. In order to find out why workers at the Hooper Ranch entrance are angry, he ignores the guards' order to mind his own business. In the darkness he slides under the barbed wire fence surrounding the compound, meets Casy. The few moments that Tom spends with Casy in the ravine give Tom a glimpse of the possibility of organizing the Okies to challenge the power structure. When the agents of that structure beat Casy down, they in effect attack the new hope in Tom that Casy inspired.

After the death of Casy, Tom's concerns extend beyond himself and his family and they now include all downtrodden people. He feels a calling to help in any way he can. Casy's violent death probably hastens Tom's decision to work for the welfare of all poor people. In order to allay Ma's fears that he will be killed without her knowing it, he says: "maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on' y a piece of a big one—an' then... it don't matter. Then I'll be around' in the dark. I'll be ever' where—wherever you look. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat... An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why I'll be there" (Steinbeck 572). Now the concept of clan loyalty has been replaced by the idea that one must help whoever needs help. He knows that serving humankind is the way to salvation, and that man must e together with other men because strength comes from unity. He perceives the larger social, humanitarian issues that such struggles symbolizes, and his commitment henceforth expands beyond the Joad family and any single group to all humanity.

We last see Tom in chapter twenty-eight when he explains to Ma his new resolve that he will lead the fight so hungry people can eat. He begins to realize that he and the others of the community must work together to drive back the oppressors who would break their spirit. Thus in the course of the novel, Tom moves from a strictly independent way of thinking only of his own comfort to a devotion to the family and an attempt to help the oppressed at the expense of his own personal comfort. His final statement is that he must now move away from the family, and accept the whole world as his family.

3.3 Ma's Conversion

Ma Joad is demonstrated as a woman who completely fulfills her role as the citadel of the family. She is hardworking, kindhearted and strong-charactered. Bing a determined

and loving woman, Ma Joad appears as the family's center of strength over the course of the novel. Regardless of how bleak circumstances become, Ma Joad meets every obstacle unflinchingly. Time and again, Ma displays a startling capacity to keep herself and her family together in face of great turmoil. She consistently proves to be the novel's strongest supporter of the family and togetherness. Ma articulates a philosophy of selfless sacrifice. With her indomitable nature, Ma Joad suggests that even the most horrible circumstances can be weathered with grace and dignity.

In the process of the Journey, Ma Joad experiences a conversion from sense of unity and love of the family to that of mankind.

At first, Ma Joad tries her best to keep the unity of the family. When there is any crisis involving her family, she acts vigorously in opposition to the person. It is she who proves the moral and sustaining strength to uphold everyone's spirit, to urge them on, no matter what adversity may overtake them. She swears to defend the sanctity and unity of the family with every effort. For example, in chapter sixteen, as the Joads and the Wilsons crawl on toward California in their vehicles, the touring car of the Wilsons' breaks down, needing a new con-rod bearing, which amount to a time-consuming repair job by Tom or Al. The Wilsons insist that the Joads go on without them. Tom offers an alternate plan: the trucks go ahead to California while he and Jim Casy remain behind to repair the car and catch up with them. It is an appealing plan in that it would enable most of the adults to get work sooner. But Ma threatens Pa with a jack handle to prevent the splitting up of the family. She says, "All we got is the family unbroken. Like a bunch of cows, when the lobos are 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" (Steinbeck 231). Now, Ma Joad gets the power of the family and takes the responsibility of protecting the family.

It is very important that the first example of spontaneous sharing with strangers on the journey is a symbolic merging of two families: Grampa's death in the Wilson's tent, his burial in one of the Wilson's blankets with a page torn from the Wilson's Bible, and Ma Joad's promise to care for Mrs. Wilson. Later, when they stayed at Weedpatch camp, a fanatical Jehovite woman threatens to become a disruptive influence, especially to Rose of Sharon. Since her ideas of sin are a bit rigid and upsetting to the pregnant girl, Ma picks up a stick of wood to order the woman out of her tent. Once again she grabs an iron skillet and is about to take a swing of indignation at the cold and contemptuous uniformed stranger who intrudes upon the privacy of the tent and calls her a strangely derogatory name, "Okies", and she takes her solitary initiative in the middle of the desert at night to prevent

the inspectors from unloading the truck and discovering Grandma's death before they are safely across the desert.

Ma's love and unity of mankind is strongly reinforced by the scene where she feeds the starving children who gather around her kettle. Though there is not enough to feed the starving children who gather around her kettle. Though there is not enough to feed her family adequately, she ladles small portions so as to leave some for the children. And in the center of that raging hunger Ma Joad fixes the family meal, while the camp children watch with wolfish eyes: "The children, fifteen of them, stood silently and watched. And when the smell of the cooking stew came to their noses, their noses crinkled slightly" (Steinbeck 344). Finally Ma ladles out her stew for the others, saying as she does so, "I can't send 'em away... I don't know what to do" (Steinbeck 351). In the government camp, one man observes, "We're all a-workin' together." (Steinbeck 465). It is in chilling contrast to the tense atmosphere at the Hooper ranch, where the prevailing paranoia is epitomized by a checker's explanation that putting holes in the bottom of buckets to keep people from stealing them. Ma learns one good thing, "If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones" (Steinbeck 513-514).

The really conversion of Ma takes place after the crisis of Rose of Sharon's delivery during the flood. In her conversation with a neighbor whom she thanks for helping during Rose of Sharon's labor, she says, "Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (Steinbeck 606). This dialogue expresses Ma Joad's idea of universal brotherhood. In the end of novel, in the barn where the family discovers the famished man, Ma's unstated suggestion that Rose of Sharon give her milk to him carries the idea of love and commitment into practice. Noboru Shimomura states, "In this way, the dissolution of the family, which Ma has desperately tried to prevent, is balanced by her growing sense of community relationship and solidarity. This sense becomes so overpowering that even Rose of Sharon, hitherto considered the socially and morally weakest Joad, gives her own milk to the starving man" (Shimomura 87). Ma Joad also encourages his son Tom Joad to work for all people and it is a philosophy of selfless sacrifice. In Ma Joad's every action, there are not only concerns for her own family, as the journey goes on; she also extends herself to help other people.

3.4 Sharon's Conversion

Rose of Sharon, as her name implies, is searching for romance and beauty in life.

She is Ma's daughter and Connie's wife, who is impractical, petulant and romantic young woman. Rose of Sharon begins the journey to California pregnant in a city. The harsh realities of migrant life soon disabuse Rose of Sharon of these ideas, however, her husband abandons her, and her child is born dead. By the end of the novel, she matures considerably, and possesses something of her mother's indomitable spirit and grace. She devotes herself to mankind by offering breast to a starving man. Theodore Pollock points out, "Whereas at the outset of the novel, because of the dust and the drought, earth has grown unproductive, the people have not, and Rose of Sharon's pregnancy is a symbol of hope and immortality" (Pollock 182).

Firstly, Rose of Sharon serves as a human clock, a timekeeper. As the child grows within her, and she prepares to convert her role from daughter to mother, she becomes balanced, careful and wise. Her whole thought and action turn inward and she is consumed with her sense of self as potential mother, as a reproductive agent. At the beginning of the trip to California Connie and Rose of Sharon share a universe of their own: "The world had drawn close around them, and they were the center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making a small orbit around her" (Steinbeck, 150). Harshly, they are blasted out of their selfish cycles. Connie behaves badly, abandoning the family and group effort as well as his wife and expected child. Rose of Sharon, on the other hand, endures many deprivations and deaths and by the end of the novel is ready to take her place beside Ma. She is freed from individual responsibility and awakened to a sense of her place in the larger unit or the community of mankind.

However, the death of her baby prepares for Rose of Sharon's sudden conversion from a self-centered nuisance to a sympathetic character. When she meets the starving man in the barn, Ma knows what must be done and it is expressed to Rose of Sharon, as Steinbeck describes:

Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping. She said, 'Yes'... For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. 'You got to,' she squirmed closer and pulled his head close. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously (Steinbeck 618-619).

In her final gesture, Rose of Sharon begins to desert her own selfishness and offers

her breast to a starving man. It is an image forecasting the final triumph of human beings. Only if people nourish and sustain one another will they achieve their happiness. The theme of the novel is illuminated in this giving of herself to a stranger, and the entire novel moves toward this final meaning: the isolated individual or family is no longer sufficient; we must be committed to all men and to the whole world.

Rose of Sharon's giving new life to the starving man symbolizes her participating in the unity of the whole people. Her behavior is the same with Jim Casy's, Tom Joad's and Ma's, and it goes beyond the family to all human beings. At the end of the novel, the remains of the family have no food to eat, no room to shelter themselves, and it seems that their materialistic dream is broken; however, they still have hope—love, love of the whole people which constitutes their spiritual dream. Steinbeck affirms their happiness by emphasizing the Joads family's conversion from individual concern with the benefits of their family into the unity of the whole people. On the whole, while *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to explore the disillusionment of their materialistic life, it much affirms the elevation of the spirit.

There are a great deal of sharing facts in the novel, and this sharing is also frequent in the choric voice of the interchapters which reflects the author's sympathetic heart for migrants under such harsh conditions: "And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good... 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 (Steinbeck 264).

It can be concluded that there is a love that goes beyond the confinement and there is a sacrifice that topples all conviction of evil human nature and there is a hope that never ends in compassionate hearts and sympathy for others.

Chapter Four Devices of Narration to Strengthen the Theme

Symbolism and irony are credible and functional devices in *The Grapes of Wrath*. John Steinbeck put great emphasis on the use of symbolism and irony to strengthen the theme. The title of *The Grapes of Wrath* is closely related to the Bible, wherein the symbol of the “grapes” has frequent appearances. John Steinbeck takes use of the symbol of the “grapes” to extract from Western people’s religious background various overlapping biblical images, thereby adds extra persuasive power to its themes. By the title of the novel we might naturally become aware of the importance of symbolism as a main artistic technique, hence the relevance to devote special concern and care in analyzing. Three of the most important symbols conspicuously jump into our horizon: the dust, the turtle and the grapes. Consequently we should be aware of the importance of symbolism and irony as important techniques and pay great attention to it.

4.1 The Use of Symbolism

Symbolic Dust

The dust in *The Grapes of Wrath* symbolizes the moral barrenness and spiritual sterility. The word “dust” is repeated twenty-seven times in chapter one, and such repetition reinforces one of the crucial themes of the novel: economic decline which will slide into disaster, and deteriorating morale of tenant farmers which will at length split up the family unit. “They do not understand that the spiritual dimensions of this wasteland are cosmic and omnipresent, and will choose them as their victims unless they grow spiritually to cope with the problem that has set in from within” (Chadha, 102-103). Such a large frequency makes it assume the function of the symbol of the spiritually barren wasteland inside and outside the Joad family. The basic situation they are confronted with is that of spiritual bankruptcy, moral and social perversion and economic depression.

The novel starts with a panoramic description of the land itself, impoverished, turning to dust and literally blowing away. It can no longer sustain its people in the old style, one small plot for each family, and it is lost to the banks and holding companies - greedy, abstract landlords which can utilize the land with a margin of profit by the ruthless mechanical exploitation of large tracts. It is the land that gives the people their unique

character and molds their lives, and it is out of the land that the novel's action develops. There is a strong bond between the land and the people throughout the book. However, now the land is diminishing. The author chronicles in the initial paragraph of *The Grapes of Wrath*, chiefly through the use of colors, the gradual destruction of the land, and the result of pervading dust. The changes in the color of a whole countryside and the deteriorating reality from land to dust have an overwhelming effect on the reader: red turns to pink, gray to white, green to brown: the ploughed earth becomes thin hard crust, and finally pervading dust.

As is known to the readers, the dust is all-pervading, and can be said to symbolize the downward-settling fortunes of the Joad family, and of all the people caught up in its destructive swirl. It is out of the land that the novel's action develops. Pay attention to the following examples of the author's utilization of every possible visual and aural effect with dust, along with the invariable association of dust with what is dying or dead: "the earth dusted down in dry little streams"; "every moving thing lifted the dust into the air"; "the dust from the roads fluffed up"; "the sky was darkened by mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away"; "the stars could not pierce the dust to get down." Other examples of similar sounds are "crust," "fluffed," "brushed" and "muffled." The wind becomes an agent of the demonic dust, almost personified as it fees over the earth, assisting the dust to dominate the other natural elements of the air, the sky, the sun and the stars. The women battle the dust on their windows and door sills. The Children are obliged to pay in it: "They drew careful lines in the dust with their toes." And the endurance of the men is tested as they face "the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust" (Steinbeck 6). The effect of the graphic, even anguished description of the physical state of things and, by implication, the mental state, is to make the reader aware of pending crises as yet unseen and whole worlds or ways of life hanging in the balance. We note that no particular people have yet been introduced, for example, the Joads and the rather generalized men and women and children who stand about bewildered in the dust seem almost to be pantomimes in some ageless and universal drama. The first lines of the novel suggest significantly that the problem of survival is timeless, elemental and common to all human beings. The dust is established here in the threatened loss of human dignity.

John Steinbeck has successfully set an ominous tone for the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* through taking dust as a pervading geographical symbol. At the same time, it demonstrates one of the most fundamental reasons which it is the deteriorating natural

disasters that has driven the farmers out of their land and force them to move to California.

Symbolic Turtle

The whole chapter three is used to describe the turtle. It stands for survival, for the mysterious and instinctive life force which prompts him to begin over again each time, despite setbacks, and his laborious progress which likewise will impel the Joads onward to California.

The turtle seems awkward but it is able to survive, like the Joads, and like them it is moving southwest, out of the dry conditions of the area. It can protect itself against a natural danger like the red ant it kills, as the Joads protect themselves by their unity. The turtle's eyes are fierce and humorous, suggesting that the Joads are a fierce and humorous family. When mismanaged human power attacks, as when a truck swerves to hit the turtle, luck is on the turtle's side. The Joads survive the mismanagement that produced the Dust Bowl and the brutalizing man-made condition in California by luck.

When we examine the brief adventure of the turtle, we find that he covers the grass, "leaving a beaten trail behind him" (Steinbeck 20). Then he confronts a hill, the highway embankment, and methodically manages itself to the flat and easier going surface of the highway, having overwhelmed straining, slipping, lifting four-inch concrete wall which borders the road, no mean achievement. We are made to see through the detail, for a turtle. And we note that the turtle has crushed a red ant in his climb. He is also dragging along with his front legs a head of wild oats - the "beards" mentioned in the first paragraph, which contain seeds. The rest of his adventure is comprised of crossing the highway, where a woman swerves to avoid hitting him but the truck driver who has just dropped off Tom Joad tries to smash him. Another matter worth noting is that the turtle is emphasized in his ancient, enduring almost primeval qualities: "high-domed shell... hard legs and yellow-nailed feet... horny beak... old humorous frowning eyes" (Steinbeck 20). The turtle crushes a red ant that gets in the way of his armored shell, and survives the truck driver's attempt to crush him. Similarly, the Joads will endure and overcome the obstacles to their journey to California. Even more significant to our understanding of the symbolic value of the turtle is the fact that when he had regained his upright position on the other side of the road, "the wild oat head fell out and three of the spearhead seeds stuck in the ground. And as the turtle crawled on down the embankment, its shell dragged dirt over the seeds" (Steinbeck 22). The turtle in his laborious journey perpetuates life, and assists in the initiation of a new growth cycle. The important idea of strenuous effort, steady progress,

and triumphant rebirth has been fully demonstrated through the turtle.

The Grapes

The novel's title *The Grapes of Wrath* is from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," a war song of American civil war, in which are the lines, "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." In fact, Battle Hymn of the Republic itself has deep biblical allusions and significance and the grape has been referred to many times in the Bible as a symbol. It has strong evocations in western readers' religious unconsciousness. John Steinbeck has ever said, "I like it because it is a march and this book is a kind of march - because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning" (Steinbeck and Robert 171). Discussion of the relationship between the symbol of the grape and the Bible in its religious sense should be given great emphasis. The "grapes" has frequent appearance throughout the novel, as a result of which we should pay special concern and care in the analysis of symbolism. Within the title come together suggestions of both the nation's revolutionary beginnings and its religious underpinnings. John Steinbeck attempts to ensure that his reader would see this novel as a work not about the Joads or the migration alone, but about the nation as a whole.

The "grapes" in the novel has two symbolic meanings, one of which is abundance and hope. In the Old Testament God promises to the Israelites the land of Canaan, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 8). Moses sends his disciples, Joshua and Oshea to spy out the land of Canaan. They come to the Brook of Eshcol in Canaan and return with a cluster of grapes after forty days. They show the fruit of the land to Moses and say, "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it" (Numbers 27). Steinbeck uses the symbolic meaning of "grapes" for abundance, as above mentioned that the one huge cluster of grapes which Joshua and Oshea bring back from their first excursion into the rich land of Canaan is a symbol of plenty, a cluster so huge that "they bare it between two on a staff"(Numbers 23). The grapes are frequently mentioned by Grampa Joad: "Jus' let me get out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There's a thing I ain't never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch of grapes off a bush, or whatever, 'an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin."(Steinbeck 112). Grampa also dreams: "They's gapes out there, just a-hangin' over into the road. Know what I'm a-gonna

do? I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full a grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, an' scrooge aroun', an' let the juice run down my pants" (Steinbeck 126). And again: "I'm getting' hungry. Come time we get to California. I'll have a big bunch a grapes in my han' al the time, a-nibblin' off it all the time, by God" (Steinbeck 141). As to Grampa, grapes are the dream of the Promised Land. It is the grapes that make the Joads and the migrants to march west to search for the land of hope. Grapes in the novel are the symbols of hope of a better life for all the migrants.

However, the symbolic meaning of abundance and hope of the "grapes" turns into pain, rage and revenge with the developing of the plots. In the Bible, the grapes are generally related to God's wrath, and are used symbolically as figuration of divine retribution upon the oppressor. In Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, Moses warns the disloyal to God and tells them God would punish them "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons and the cruel venom of asps..." (Deuteronomy 32). In Jeremiah: "In those days they shall say no more. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and their children's teeth are set on edge" (Jeremiah 29). And in Revelation: "And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the grapes of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation" (Revelation 9). In the 1930s of America, millions of sharecroppers lost their homes and lands because of the drought and the Great Depression. The homeless bankrupt tenants marched westward to California searching the dream of grapes of hope and plenty. In the long and hard trek the grapes became their spiritual power and gave them courage and hope to confront with all difficulties in the journey. However, when they reached California, life showed the cruel side to them and disillusion fell on them. Most of the migrants were still out of work and for those who found work were oppressed by the employers. Their wages were too low to support the family and many migrants were starving and had to beg around. Their dreaming paradise California is turned out to be a fallen land, riddled by greed of the capitalists. John Steinbeck describes in his novel:

Burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes a hot fire. Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. Slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth. There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that

weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange... and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; 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 (Steinbeck 477).

John Steinbeck uses God's wrath in the Bible to symbolize the anger of the people. Obviously the grapes in the novel have turned into the symbol of great anger. The grapes of hope have transformed into the grapes of wrath. The exploitation and oppression have forced people to the edge of death and may finally results in anger from their deep hearts. The disappearance of fear and the increase of anger stimulate people's realization of united force together.

The Grapes of Wrath, as taken from Battle Hymn of the Republic, evokes an invincible army marching on to victory in vision and emotion. Although the Joads and all the migrants are suffered from great frustrations and depressions, they are depicted as an army in wrath marching toward hope and happiness of life. The symbolic meanings of the "grapes" and its evocations have sustaining impact on the westerners for its biblical origin. Steinbeck implies in his novel that social revolution will be imminent if nothing is done to stop the detonation. People's rage will lead to revolutionary action and revolt against the oppressors just like god finally shows his wrath on the evil.

4.2 The Use of Irony

Irony is another frequently used artistic feature in order to strengthen the theme of the novel. When Pa first meets Tom who just returns from the prison, he asks him anxiously, "You ain't busted out? You ain't got to hide?" Tom says, "Naw, I'm paroled. I'm free." (Steinbeck 97) Tom's negative answer locates the sense of irony in the novel. It can be concluded that it is not the convicts but the common people who hide in such a society where the ordinary is turned into the fugitive. Similarly, it can be deducted that Tom's release stills means no freedom.

An obvious example of irony is what Ma Joad says, "If you're in trouble or hurt or need - go to poor people. They are the only ones that'll help - the only ones." (335) It means that if we need something we have to go to people who have nothing for help instead of the rich. The first example is at the truck station in chapter five when the restaurant owner and the waitress give the family bread at a discounted price and candy

when it is actually much more expensive. The truck driver then leaves large tips to the waitress. Although both the truck driver and the restaurant owner are very poor, they are quite generous to those poorer people. And in chapter seventeen the person working for the car dump gives Tom and Al things for way discounted rates. In chapter twenty-four the clerk in the company store lends Ma ten cents so that she can get sugar for the coffee. We can also see this when the Joads help with the Wilsons; when the Joads give their food to the starving children even though they are not enough for their own family.

However, the generosity of the poor are contrasted to the rich who are mean and cruel to the migrants. In chapter seven, the car dealer rips the people off by selling them pieces of junk for high prices. They use cheap tricks such as pouring sawdust into the gears or transmission to cut down the noise of the car and make profit through the tenants' ignorance of cars and interest rates. Besides, in chapter nineteen, chapter twenty-one and chapter twenty-five, the large land owners cheat the migrants and the smaller land owners to make profit. We can see through the westward journey that the land owners cut down the migrants' wage for those people can do nothing but obey because they and the families are starving. At the same time, the rich dump the excess food to keep the prices high and keep the migrants from getting them with guards.

Through the contrast, we can deduct what a miserable life the migrants are living in the Great Depression and how unfair and mean the capitalists are. It is those poor experiences covered with tears and blood that the migrants realize that only when all of them unit together can they change their fate and create a brilliant life and future.

Conclusion

John Steinbeck, the great writer, wins the Nobel Prize in literature in 1962 for his unswerving adherence to reality, his deep sympathy for the poor and his strong belief in humanity. He is a writer whose commission is to expose grievous faults, with dredging up to light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement; he is a writer who is delegated to declare and celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit - for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love; he is a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man. It is under this unchangeable belief in humanity and morality that Steinbeck has a sense of urgency and responsibility to expose the desperate conditions of Dust Bowl migrants and arouse people's sympathy and cooperation in the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. From lifelike characters, regional settings, compassionate tone and forward-looking directions comes the unique power and charm of *The Grapes of Wrath*. It is a novel of its times, and it is also a novel for all times.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck analyzes the sociological, political, economic and ecological aspects of migrants of Oklahoma during the Great Depression. He also depicts the inner life of the Joad family, including their emotional, intellectual, spiritual and ethical state and development. The novel is the story of human beings' need for commitment to humanity. Through the westward journey, the Joads transform from an exclusive concern for family interests into a broader vision of cooperation with all oppressed people. The thesis is divided into four chapters: the first chapter gives a brief introduction to *The Grapes of Wrath*; the second chapter demonstrates the noble spirit the Joads are endowed with, the third chapter demonstrates the spiritual conversion of the Joads; the fourth chapter will analyze the devices of narration used in the novel to strengthen this theme.

Steinbeck puts great emphasis on the use of symbolism and irony to strengthen the theme. The "dust", the "turtle", and the "grapes" are the three obvious symbolic representatives in the novel. Steinbeck takes use of the symbol of the "grapes" to extract from Western people's religious background various overlapping biblical images, thereby adds an extra persuasive power to its themes.

Through the study of the theme of *The Grapes of Wrath*, this thesis aims to give us a deep comprehension of John Steinbeck and his works. Many critics once claimed that *The*

Grapes of Wrath is a protest novel in which Steinbeck expressed his anger and protest against the intolerable wrongs. They regard the major theme of the novel as great hatred towards the capitalism. However, through the study of this thesis, it is believed that the major theme of the novel is to demonstrate the spiritual conversion of the Joads during their westward journey on the basis of the noble spirit the family is endowed with. John Steinbeck has written to his publisher to state that his whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other. From what he said, we can see that Steinbeck wrote this book to eliminate misunderstandings between the individual and to arouse their sense of cooperation and caring for others. Consequently, what we learn from this novel is not hatred, but the optimistic impact of life: no matter what era we are in, no matter what kind of dilemma we are confronted with, we cannot become the victim of the disaster by fate, and we should live a wonderful life through cooperation with others and learn to care for all the human beings.

The novel is of universal significance, in which the tone that dominates all scenes is the benefit of all the people against that of the individual. The social setting, the economic condition and the ecological setup establish the epitome which represents the macrocosmic world where the Joads represents the conversion of humanity from a self-centered isolation to spiritual and moral state of universal love. Robert E. Spiller has declared that *The Grapes of Wrath* is an American epic, a culminating expression of the spiritual and material forces that had led to the discovery and settlement of a continent. *The Grapes of Wrath* is undoubtedly a classic of American literature and is worthy of respect and appreciation for ever.

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