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硕士学位论文

葡萄的悲剧——解读《愤怒的葡萄》中的自然主义内涵

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摘要

斯坦贝克是美国 20 世纪著名的小说家、戏剧家和散文家，一生作品颇多。《愤怒的葡萄》是他的代表作，讲述了 20 世纪 30 年代美国经济大萧条时期季节工人的悲惨故事，展示了当时美国农民在生死线上挣扎、反抗的情景。

本文作者从自然主义的角度分析这部作品，阐述了作者斯坦贝克的自然主义思想和小说的主题，即在这个弱肉强食的社会，人类的进化遵从“适者生存”法则。由于受到遗传和环境的影响，人无法控制自己的命运，所有的抗争和努力终会化为泡影。本文分析了小说中自然环境和社会环境对人类命运的决定作用、自然主义小说的写作特征以及美国自然主义在这部小说中的独特内涵。论文分三部分解读《愤怒的葡萄》中所体现的自然主义思想，即引言，主体部分和结论，其中主体部分分为四章。

引言部分简要介绍了斯坦贝克的生平及其作品，以及国内外对斯坦贝克作品《愤怒的葡萄》的研究。

第一章主要简述了自然主义流派的起源，在美国的发展以及在斯坦贝克作品的体现。

第二章主要根据自然主义的核心哲学——决定论，从自然环境和社会环境对人的决定来分析《愤怒的葡萄》，讨论了小说中干旱、沙尘暴、洪水等自然环境以及失业、歧视、压迫等社会环境对人类命运的决定作用。

第三章阐述了小说中所体现的自然主义写作特征，即描述下层人民的生活、追求完全的客观、以人物的生存取向为主题、作品中充满着悲观的情绪。

第四章阐明了美国自然主义在这部小说中的独特内涵，即困境下季节工的生存梦想，美国下层人民的美德，以及作为季节工象征的葡萄的悲剧。

结论部分总结了整篇论文，并指出《愤怒的葡萄》属于伟大的自然主义小说范畴。

小说中讲述的故事是一个痛彻心扉的悲剧，作品中的人物遭受着身心双重的折磨。他们有过土地梦和家的梦想，与这个残忍的现实抗争过，但是仍然无法改变自己的命运。斯坦贝克真实地揭露了 20 世纪 30 年代经济大萧条下季节工人无望的生存现状，赋予了《愤怒的葡萄》丰富的自然主义内涵。

摘要

关键词：斯坦贝克；《愤怒的葡萄》；自然主义；悲剧

Abstract

Steinbeck is a famous prolific American novelist, playwright and essayist in the 20th century with *The Grapes of Wrath* as his masterpiece. This novel tells us a miserable story about the migrant workers during the Great Depression in 1930s in America, revealing the situation of American farmers struggling on the edge of survival and resisting in vain at that time.

The author of this thesis tries to study the novel from the perspective of naturalism, and analyze the theme of this great work, that is, determined by heredity and environment, human beings cannot control their fate, but have to obey “survival of the fittest”, the Law of Jungle, and all the resistance or struggle will be futile. This thesis analyzes the determination of natural and social forces, writing characteristics of naturalistic novels Steinbeck employs in the novel and the unique connotations of American naturalism. This thesis is intended to interpret naturalism embodied in *The Grapes of Wrath* and divided into three parts: introduction, main body and conclusion, with four chapters in the main body.

The first part is an introduction to John Steinbeck and the literature review on *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Chapter One presents the origin of naturalism, its development in America, and its representations in Steinbeck's works.

Chapter Two demonstrates the determination of natural forces such as drought, dust bowl, and flood and social forces such as unemployment, discrimination, and depression reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath* according to the core philosophy of naturalism---determinism.

Chapter Three explains the writing characteristics of naturalism employed by Steinbeck in the novel, such as describing the lower class people, pursuing total objectivity, orientating survival subject, and the pessimistic outlook.

Chapter Four analyzes the unique connotations of American naturalism reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath*, such as the migrants' survival dream in the plight, goodness of American lower class people, and the tragedy of the grapes which is a symbol of the migrants.

In the last part, the conclusion of the whole thesis is drawn: *The Grapes of Wrath* can be categorized as a great naturalistic novel.

The story told in this novel is a great tragedy with the characters suffering from pain in both body and mind. They ever have had a land dream and a family dream, and struggled against the cruel reality, but cannot change their fate. Steinbeck reveals truly the hopeless situation of the migrant workers in the period of 1930s Great Depression, endowing *The Grapes of Wrath* magnificent naturalistic connotation.

Key Words: Steinbeck; *The Grapes of Wrath*; naturalism; tragedy

Introduction

John Earnest Steinbeck (1902---1968) is considered one of the best-known American novelist of the 20th century and a playwright, an essayist, and an amateur marine biologist in the meantime. He was born in Salinas, California and lived most of his forty years in the Salinas valley. His father was a government official, and his mother a school teacher. He went to Stanford University (1919-1925), but never graduated. He did a wide range of jobs, working as a chemist's assistant, a surveyor, and a migratory fruit-picker, and this became a very educational period for him because it set the basis of his works.

During his lifetime, Steinbeck produced more than thirty volumes of fictions and nonfictions, which attracted a lot of readers from different cultures. He wrote some romantic books such as *Cup of Gold* (1929), *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), but these works didn't make influential stir on the literary scene. Then in 1935, Steinbeck discovered both his subject and his method. The book that appeared that year, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), made him popular. The next year he wrote a book about a strike entitled *In Dubious Battle*, a very articulate "proletarian" story, beginning his period of concern with the class struggle in the United States. When *Of Mice and Men* appeared in 1937, it became a bestseller. This story was written into a play and a movie and made Steinbeck's reputation. His greatest book is, of course, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which won in time the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The World War II furnished Steinbeck with materials for some of his books like *The Moon is Down* (1942). His later books include *East of Eden* (1952), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), and *Travels with Charley* (1962). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck's masterpiece and one of the major American books is about a tragic story of a family of sharecroppers, the Joads. In the 1930s of America, millions of sharecroppers lose their homes and land because of the drought and the Great Depression. The homeless bankrupt tenants march westward to California hoping to live a better life, and the Joads are members of the migrants. In

the long and hard trek, jobs of high payment and better living conditions become their spiritual power and give them courage and hope to confront with all difficulties in the journey. However, the journey to the west is a most tragic and brutalizing human experience for families like the Joads. There is unspeakable pain and suffering on the road, Grandpa and Grandma pass away on the way. Noah deserts the family, and Connie leaves his wife who gives to a stillborn baby later. Tom becomes a fugitive and Casy is killed at last, so the family unit itself breaks up. When they reach California, life shows the cruel side to them and disillusion falls on them. Most of the migrants are still out of work and those who have found work are oppressed by the employers. Their wages are too low to support the family and many migrants are starving and have to beg around. As the novel progresses, they become more and more impoverished, until at the end they are destitute, hungry and sick, their truck and goods have been abandoned in the mud, and they have no shelter and no hope of work. The paradise in their dream turns out to be a fallen land, riddled by the greed of the capitalists.

The Grapes of Wrath is Steinbeck's clear expression of sympathy with the dispossessed and the wretched. Right after the publication of this book in 1939, critics became much interested in Steinbeck and his work. Though the appearance of this novel draws so many critics' attention, their topics, methods and points of view are different. There has all along been a great controversy about Steinbeck criticism. The unfavorable situation for Steinbeck in the studies of *The Grapes of Wrath* lasted from the early 1940s to the late 1950s. The novel is attacked and banned for a long time on both ideological and artistic grounds. It is accused of being communist and a structurally formless book. Right after the publication of the book, Harry Thornton Moore employs an analytic approach to Steinbeck's novels and examines their form and content, pointing out certain weakness as well as virtues of Steinbeck's novels in his *The Novels of Steinbeck: A First Critical Study*.

In the aspect of language and the content of the novel, Kate O'Brien considers Steinbeck's language as a failure in the *New Yorker*. He says: "I dislike the manner of his writing which I think epitomizes the intolerable sentimentality of American 'realism'" (O'Brien 386). Claude Edmonde Magny thinks that Steinbeck's "range of

expressing is strangely limited by the collapse of his syntax, which is incapable of expressing logical connections if ever so slightly abstract and by the inadequacy of his vocabulary.” (Tedlock 225) In commenting on the intercalary chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Hoffman declares: “A study of the style, rhetoric and intellectual content of the fifteen chapters reveals Steinbeck’s writing at its worst.” (Hoffman 153) Steinbeck has also been criticized as being “lack of artistic invention” and “close attachment to politics and reality.” (Hoffman 160)

Despite the unfavorable criticism, Steinbeck gradually wins recognition and supporters among critics. With the publication of Peter Lisca’s *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, there appeared a new trend in the Steinbeck studies. The critic considers that Steinbeck’s uniqueness lies in his capacity to examine society in the context of nature, and that it “has enabled Steinbeck, almost alone among the writers of his generation, to give permanent aesthetic values to the materials of the Great Depression.” (Lisca 294) Many critics praise *The Grapes of Wrath* as “proletarian”, and they emphasize the value of Steinbeck’s works in exposing the social reality and class conflicts. Joseph Blotner notes that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a proletarian novel because it relates the experience of those people impoverished during the Great Depression (Blotner 8-9). Malcolm Cowley, a well-known critic, claims that *The Grapes of Wrath* belongs very highly in the category of the great angry books like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that has aroused the people to fight against the intolerable wrongs (McElrath 167). According to Gordon Milne, Steinbeck, along with Sinclair Lewis and John Dos Passos, joined a left movement that is “concerned with a different aspect of politics, with its theory and ideological content” and chose to “deal with the threat posed by international Communism.” (Milne 105)

Archetype criticism and mythic criticism are also employed in Steinbeck studies. To *The Grapes of Wrath*, J. P. Hunter only demonstrates that, “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.” (Wyatt 7)

Steinbeck is not only a writer who cares about society and the poor, but also an amateur marine biologist. Under the influence of his lifelong friend, the marine biologist Edward Flanders Robb Ricketts, Steinbeck develops a great interest in

environment, so Steinbeck is thought as an ecologist. In recent years, scholars begin to approach Steinbeck's work from the perspective of eco-criticism, which is a new term dated from 1978. During the 1980s, more scopes began to appear in Steinbeck criticism. There are also researches in his nonfiction as well as his short stories. Some contemporary critical theories, such as feminism, multiculturalism, and new historicism begin to be implied in Steinbeck studies.

Most of Steinbeck's works were introduced into China as early as 1940s, and the great writer has received a systematic research in China. Before 1980s most literary critics put *The Grapes of Wrath* into the category of "social protest novel" or "proletarian novel" for the political reasons. In *John Steinbeck and His Works* by Dr. Su Suocai, Su introduces Steinbeck's life and the major plots of *The Grapes of Wrath* and analyzed the themes. He praises the power of the group and the cooperation and friendship among human beings in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mr. Dong Hengxun is an expert on Steinbeck in China, who thinks highly of Steinbeck's later works, such as *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Red Pony* and *The Pearl*. He has analyzed the historic material and writing form of *The Grapes of Wrath* in his article. In China there are three doctoral dissertations on Steinbeck, including Fang Jie's research on Steinbeck's migrant worker trilogy, Yang Caixia's study on William Faulkner and John Steinbeck's Biblical tradition and Tian Junwu's work on the poetics in John Steinbeck's novels, and Dr. Tian Junwu, whose research covers a lot of Steinbeck study areas, is now the leading researcher in China on John Steinbeck criticism.

Study of *The Grapes of Wrath* from the perspective of naturalism can be found in some articles in our country. In "Interpreting *The Grapes of Wrath*", Zhou Zheng analyzes the naturalistic features in this novel, and points out that Steinbeck's description of the transformation from "I" consciousness to "we" consciousness is an important contribution to the naturalist novels in 1930s. In "Naturalism in *The Grapes of Wrath*" written by Gao Mingxia, naturalism is interpreted in aspects of the human beast, natural and social factors, and spiritual growth of the characters.

Based on the former study, this thesis is aimed at providing a detailed and further study on naturalism embodied in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Through the analysis

of this novel, the author believes that John Steinbeck can be cast as the sort of naturalistic writers, and that the study of naturalistic tendency in Steinbeck's work will be in some way contributing to the study of American naturalistic fictions.

The thesis can be divided into three parts: introduction, main body, and conclusion, and there are four chapters contained in the main body. The first part is an introduction to John Steinbeck and a literary review on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Chapter One presents the origin of naturalism, its development in America, and its reflection in Steinbeck's works. Chapter Two demonstrates the determination of natural forces such as drought, dust bowl, and flood and social forces such as unemployment, discrimination, and depression reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath* according to the core philosophy of naturalism---determinism. Chapter Three explains the writing characteristics of naturalism employed by Steinbeck in the novel, such as describing the lower class people, pursuing total objectivity, orientating survival subject, and the pessimistic outlook. Chapter Four analyzes the unique connotations of American naturalism reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath*, such as the migrants' survival dream in the plight, goodness of American lower class people, and the tragedy of the grapes which is a symbol of the migrants. The last part is a conclusion of the whole thesis.

Chapter One Naturalism as a Theory

1.1 Origin of Naturalism

It seems hard to give an exact definition of naturalism. As a literary movement, naturalism grew out of the 19th century realism. Oxford Concise Dictionary defines naturalism as “a more deliberate kind of realism in novels, stories, and plays, usually involving a view human beings as passive victims of natural forces and social environment” (Baldick 146). There is a more comparatively detailed definition in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Naturalism, late 19th and early 20th century aesthetic movement, inspired by adaptation of the principles and methods of natural science, especially the Darwinian view of nature, to literature and art. In literature it extended the tradition of realism, aiming at an even more faithful, unselective representation of reality, a veritable “slice of life”, presented without moral judgment. Naturalism differed from Realism in its assumption of scientific determinism, which led naturalistic authors to emphasize man’s accidental, physiological nature rather than his moral or rational qualities. Individual characters were seen as helpless products of heredity and environment, motivated by strong instinctual drives from within, and harassed by social and economic pressures from without. As such, they had little will or responsibility for their fates, and the prognosis for their “cases” was pessimistic at the outset (Ottawa 559).

Naturalism is a cultural product of the very age of the 19th century, when the industrial revolution spread over the entire Western Europe and North America, bringing about dramatically social and economic changes. Thus natural science prevailed and achieved much in many fields. The main momentum for naturalism came from the determinism philosophical theories of the 19th century which dominated both natural and social sciences. In 1859 Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was published and his evolutionary theory brought dramatic change in humans’ understanding of nature and human beings themselves. It broke with the

traditional philosophy and theology, and thus new natural philosophy with pessimism as its characteristic emerged. In the new philosophy, human beings are not made by God; instead they have evolved from the lower forms of life over a long period of time, and man himself, controlled by blind and purposeless forces of nature, can not master his own fate. Darwin also emphasizes the struggle for existence in nature's creating or destroying different species of life. In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin explains that the fit---those adapted to current conditions---survives, while those poorly adapt to the environment gradually die out. Later, British philosopher Herbert Spencer interprets Darwin's theory as "survival of the fittest", which becomes the theoretical basis of naturalism. Donald Pizer once pointed out that, "Darwin also creates a context that makes naturalism—with its stress upon theories of heredity and environment, a convincing way to explain the nature of reality for the late 19th century." (Pizer 47)

As a literary movement, naturalism originates in France. Emile Zola, a French writer and theorist, is universally considered as the forerunner of naturalism, and he establishes the theory of naturalistic novels. Zola sees truth as the life of literature, the only object of fiction. So he believes that a novelist should function like a scientist, observing nature and social reality, rejecting supernatural explanations of the world, refusing absolute standards of morality and free will, and depicting nature and human experience as deterministic and mechanistic process. According to Zola, the only way to lively characters in a novel lies in the real portray of characters. Inspired by Claude Bernard's *Introduction à la médecine expérimentale* (1865) Zola tries to adjust scientific principles in the process of observing society and interpreting it in fiction. Thus a novelist, who gathers and analyzes documents and other materials, becomes a part of the scientific research.

In his famous *The Experimental Novel*, Zola proposes to create experimental novels, pointing out that authors of experimental novels should record the specific response in the given setting of heredity and environment. Zola argues, "The best novelist was an empirical observer rather than an imaginative creator" (Lehan 529). Under the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution, Zola does not much believe in the possibility of individual freedom, but emphasizes that "events arise fatally,

implacably, and men, either with or against their wills, are involved in them. Such is the absolute law of human progress.” Zola believes deeply that determined by heredity and environment, human beings are the product of his temperament in a social context, so he redefines naturalism as “Nature seen through a temperament.”

1.2 An Overview of American Naturalism

In the latter part of the 19th century in America, great historical changes took place. The decades after the Civil War witnessed the emergence of “Modern American.” Industry and science and the new philosophy of life based upon science were among the important factors which helped to create the economic, social, and cultural transformations of the country. Industrialism produced the financial giants, but at the same time bankruptcy and unemployment began to increase, accelerating the instability of society, thus a new class—proletariat appeared, members of which came from the lowest class of the society, becoming the machine of capitalism. Slums appeared in great numbers where conditions became steadily worse, and the poor in cities lived a life of insecurity, suffering, and violence. One of the worst slum areas was the New York Bowery which Stephen Crane wrote in some of his stories. The westward expansion continued to push the frontier nearer the Pacific coast, and the settlers found themselves subject to the cold manipulation of forces, and farmers were driven to bankruptcy, as can be seen in Frank Norris’ trilogy of wheat. Howells’ “happy continent” became now “odious” to this once smiling American.

In such a society of chaos, under the influence of Darwinian’s evolutionary, new ideas about man and man’s place in the universe began to take root in America. As Professor Chang Yaixin puts it, “living in a cold, indifferent, and essentially godless world, man is no longer free in any sense of the world. He is completely thrown upon himself for survival. The world in which God was still good and warm and caring enough is gone not to return, and the comfortable belief that man can hope to fall back on divine help and guidance is exploded and lost.” (Chang 201) Life becomes a struggle for survival. The Darwinian concepts like “the survival of the fittest” and “the human beast” become popular catchwords and standards of moral

reference in an amoral world. Darwin's ideas of evolution and especially those of Herbert Spencer and his vogue in America help to change the outlook of many rising authors and intellectuals, and produce an attitude of gloom and despair which characterizes American literature of this period. Apart from this, a pessimistic view about man's weakness embodied in American Calvinism also exerts influence on people in this period. Thus, American naturalism, as a convincing means to explain the nature of reality for the late 19th century, also rose at the end of the 19th century.

American Naturalism emerges during the time when realism prevails, so it is complicatedly related with realism. Naturalism is extreme critical realism; it carries the characters like objectivity and reality of realism, but contains new interpretation of life and reality, so it is essentially different from realism in creation ideas, perspectives, and techniques.

As Engels says, realism aims at shaping "model personality in typical environment", so the characters and environment in realistic works are definitely typified on the basis of realists' will and understanding of life, not true reflection of reality (Zhang & Yang 37). Details in realistic works always imply symbolism, containing thoughts of the writers. Environment in realistic works is not the objective one, but is used by the writers to highlight personalities and explain how the characters are formed. While in naturalism environment is totally true and objective without the subjective intention of the writers and is just the background of different classes and people. Here human beings are controlled and destroyed by the environment both physically and spiritually. Lower class people struggle for survival in the trap, and upper class people, with their power and position, fall in the trap and degenerate. Such real, horrible and disgusting environment makes readers recognize clearly the evil nature of capitalism and the reason for the suffering of poor people, thus reaching the truth objectively.

Many American naturalists are influenced deeply by Zola. They use a scientific method to write their novels through the objective study of human beings governed by forces that are beyond their control. They tear the mask of gentility to pieces and write about the helplessness of man, his insignificance in a cold world, and his lack of dignity in face of the crushing forces of environment and heredity. Most American

naturalists show a great interest in the animal or irrational motive such as survival, sexuality, and violence for human behavior. Nature, a totally indifferent force, neither kind nor wise to human beings, will never be helpful. With a deterministic world, the naturalistic novels often describe human beings' futile attempts to pursue the free will.

Famous naturalistic writers like Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London all reveal a bitter and wretched world where human beings are reduced to "human beast". Crane is a pioneer writer in the American naturalistic tradition, and his *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is the first uncompromising naturalistic novel in America. *Maggie* is a typical representative of the slum life in Howell's once "happy" life, and in this novel environment is a "tremendous" thing for an insignificant human being to battle against. *The Red Badge of Courage* is one of the greatest war novels. By de-romanticizing war and heroism, Crane presents the theme of the animal man in a cold, manipulating world. Norris is famous for his masterpiece *The Octopus*, which illustrates how social and economic conditions ruined the lives of the innocent and powerless people. Greatly influenced by Herbert Spencer, Dreiser learned to regard man as merely an animal driven by greed and lust in a struggle for existence in which only the "fittest", the most ruthless, survive. *Sister Carrie* tells us a tragic story about Carrie who loses all her dreams of living a better life in big city, a cold and harsh world beyond her comprehension. All the writers have offered the vivid pictures of lives of the immigrants who lived in slums and the illegal sexual affairs of young girls who moved from countryside to big cities. They write about the downtrodden who have the ability but not the opportunities to grow, who do not understand themselves or the surroundings. On the one hand, American naturalists or those writers who are influenced by naturalism follow their French forerunners to create from observation and biological determinism and emphasize the instinct that governs human behaviors; on the other hand, they depend more on their own understanding of life in the actual creation. Thereby, compared with French naturalists, American naturalists have made great progress in opening up the new subject matters and expressing the social tragedy.

American naturalism of the turn of 20th century is considered as a significant

movement in American literature history, as an appropriate expression to reflect the destructive mechanistic and Darwinian world of struggle against the economic and social forces. As an expressive means of the new reality of America to dramatize “a panoramic world and chaotic inner life”, naturalism indeed seems to appeal to American writers of each generation. As Donald Pizer points out in *American Realism and Naturalism* that “naturalism thus truly ‘refuses to die’ in America” (Pizer 14). Naturalism, in its various interests and strategies, has continued to flourish, and the most striking characteristic of this literary trend in the 20th century lies in its adaptability to fresh currents of value and experiences in each age while maintaining a core concept of naturalistic preoccupation. With its ongoing vitality, in the 1930s with the outburst of the economic crisis, the theme is worked out in narratives of “group defeat or of personal emptiness and collapse” (ibid 13) in the works of John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos, and James T. Farrell. It continues to develop in the 1940s and 1950s in the early works of William Styron, and Norman Mailer, with the theme that is often “combined with the existential theme of the need for a quest for meaning in the face of the inadequacy of social life and belief” (ibid 13). “And it persists in the partial recovery of the naturalistic themes of political constraint and urban blight” (ibid 13) in the works of such contemporary novelists as Robert Stone, Joyce Carol Oates (in her early novels), and John Barth, Thomas Pynchon. Besides the writers mentioned above, we can also find the powerful naturalistic tendency in the fiction of such literary giants as Faulkner and Hemingway. “Faulkner’s major theme of the burden of the past as expressed through regional and family destiny strikes a firm naturalistic note, as does Hemingway’s preoccupation with the behavioristic interplay between temperament and setting.” (ibid 14) Even Edith Wharton is increasingly viewed as a naturalist, with her central theme of “the entrapment of women within social codes and taboos” (ibid 14). Indeed, according to Pizer, “the most perceptive and important critic of American naturalism since Walcott at least” (Giles 7), has emphasized that in the United States this literary genre has been constantly evolving, rather than static and fixed.

1.3 The Naturalistic Tendency in Steinbeck's Works

Compared with the glittering twenties, the 1930s is often regarded as a dim decade. After World War I, great economic and ecological forces brought about many poor people and migrant agriculture workers. The Wall Street crash of 1929 made matters worse, thus set the tone for the writing of the decade. On October 24, 1929, the stock market crashed, and then the Great Depression began. Banks failed, factories closed, and agriculture withered, so millions of jobless workers and farmers from the Great Plains states, such as Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas, began to migrate to California. As the Depression spread, life became a nightmare of a survival struggle for millions of people, and there was overall chaos with little or no cheer. Food rotted while people starved; textile mills shut down while people needed clothing; and farmers lost their farms because they produced too much. The “milk and honey” of the land went down the drain instead of nourishing its people. Just as the crisis of 1893 was to some extent instrumental in introducing the violence of the naturalistic rhetoric in the last years of the nineteenth century, the impact of the crisis of the thirties brought about a revival of the naturalist tradition.

As a great writer in the 1930s, Steinbeck noted down frankly the years full of anger and disaster. During his college time, Steinbeck found jobs a worker on a pasture and a roadman in a building group, so he was familiar with the life of the lower class people. Characters in the works of Steinbeck are often from the lower-class and ill-educated. The most common stories are about the farm workers of the 1930s, their attempts at pursuing free choice hamstrung by forces beyond their control. The soil erosion of the Great Plains, coupled with a seven-year drought that began in 1931, turned the once fertile grasslands into a region of desert, which is known as the Dust Bowl. Hundreds of thousands of farmers were forced to leave their homeland and headed for California, which seemed like a promised land for them. However, after suffering a lot on the way to California, when they arrived at their destination, what presented in front of them was a harder life in finding jobs. Migrant workers often met with scorn by California farmers and natives, which only made their situation of the dislocation and poverty even worse.

John Steinbeck captured the plight of migrant workers in his works like *In*

Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Man and his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*. Their humble dream of a better life on their own farm is prevented by the cruel and powerful forces beyond their control, so very few find it to be the land of opportunity. Oppressed by the unfavorable forces, the farmers are doomed to a miserable and even desperate life.

In *Of Mice and Man*, Steinbeck narrates the bitter experience of two farm workers George and Lennie. They are two ranch hands who struggle to achieve the dream of owning a patch of land of their own. In the book, Steinbeck presents the harsh situations of the ranch workers, the loneliness they suffered, the eagerness of the powerless to improve their living conditions and the dreams that they want to realize. In front of the cruel reality, their wish of a permanent home, a very small house and a small piece of land is pure daydream. Lennie ends in death and George a hopeless future. Here the readers can feel the irresistibility of fate and helplessness of the poor farmers.

In 1937, Steinbeck tramped to California with the farmers from Oklahoma and witnessed the miserable scenes. This experience endows him with a life basis of his creation, making his works real and authentic. With great sympathy to the migrant workers, Steinbeck brings the world his best-known novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In this novel, Steinbeck records in total objectivity the dreary experience of the Joads, their futile attempts to a better life and the disillusion of their land dream, presenting the readers a desperate journey to the so-called Promised Land. In *Twentieth-century American Literary Naturalism*, Pizer compares *The Grapes of Wrath* with Norris's *The Octopus* and thought the former is a survival tragedy of naturalism (Pizer 68).

Steinbeck focuses on the miserable life of the distressed in total objectivity. Characters in Steinbeck's works try their best to battle with the hostile environment but can not escape from the destructive forces of the environment and often end in tragedy. Thus pessimism is an outstanding feature in the works. The following chapters will aim at naturalism reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Chapter Two Determination of the Environment in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Famous critic Charles C. Walcutt thinks that the fundamental idea of Naturalism is “determinism, existentialism, violence, and anti-taboo”. According to what Walcutt says, determinism is the core, that is to say, influence of natural law and society is far stronger than human’s will; the existentialism is the application of determinism in the competition among the living beings. It is because nature causes human beings to battle over survival that life must be violent. Then survival and violence make the naturalists go against the traditions, social taboos, or cultural limitation (Fang 122). Naturalistic writers tend to reduce human to animals, which are helpless before the powerful environment forces and show the weakness and fragility of human beings.

2.1 Determination of Natural Environment

According to naturalism, nature plays a decisive role in human’s life, and it is usually indifferent to human beings, or even becomes an unfavorable factor in human’s attempt to success. As a naturalistic writer, Steinbeck pays much attention to the description of the natural environment. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the environment just becomes disastrous.

At the beginning of the novel, the Dust Bowl and drought are described in details by Steinbeck, giving the story a tragic atmosphere:

...In the roads where the teams moved, where the wheels milled the ground and the hooves of the horses beat ground, the dirt crust broke and the dust formed. Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air: walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it, the dust was long in setting back again (Steinbeck “The Grapes of Wrath” 4).

...Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. The rain crust broke

and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke (ibid 4).

When the night comes again, it is black night, for the stars can not pierce the dust to get down, and the window lights can not even spread beyond their own yards. Every family shut tightly their doors and windows, and the wedge cloth around them in order to keep away from the dust, but the dust comes in so thinly that it can not be seen in the air, settling on the chairs, tables, dishes, and door sills. As a result, "the dust-filled air muffled sound more completely than fog does." (ibid5) In the morning the dust hangs like fog, making the sun red as the new blood. The dust sifted down from the sky day after day, covering the earth like a blanket, settling on the corn, and piling up on the tops of the fence posts, wires, roofs, weeds and trees.

The erosion of the soil makes the farmland a desert, and dust comes down the sky and shed everywhere, making the world dusty and gray, making people gloomy. They don't know how to change the situation. Environment becomes so harsh to people here, and it is just an oppressive setting for the world, a setting that provides no hope, making the future dark.

However, the environment will never stint its torture on human. Drought makes the matters worse. As can be seen in *The Grapes of Wrath*, drought pervades in the Oklahoma:

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth (ibid 3).

...And as the sharp sun struck day after day, the leaves of the young corn became less stiff and erect; they bent in a curve at first, and then, as the central ribs of strength grew weak, each leaf tiled downward. Then it was June, and the sun shone more fiercely. The brown lines on the leaves widened and moved in on the central ribs. The weeds frayed and edged back toward their roots (ibid 3).

Human is usually forced by the environment and has no free choice according to the naturalists. So is the same with the characters in Steinbeck's stories. Farmers

can not grow crops on the dry but once good land to support their family. They are half starved, their kids are hungry all the time, and they nearly got no clothes. They just become very confused about the plight and without a good way to pull through the difficulty. Under such unfavorable situation given by the environment, they are driven to leave their beloved homeland and head to the west, thus beginning their hard journey.

If the Dust Bowl and the drought are the direct cause of the misery of the Joads, then the flood is the chief reason that leads to the loss of their last shelter. With the dream that they will live a better life in California, they join in the people heading to the west. After series of sufferings, they become unemployed once more. At this time, God is nowhere to find, and the environment shows its cruelty again. The migrants form a so-called cotton camp by several boxcars standing on a little flat beside the stream, and this becomes a shelter of the poor cotton pickers, but the ruthless rain in the late autumn makes them lose the last shelter.

At first, the rain relieves the dry earth, but as the rain turns to rainstorm, disaster begins. When the first rain starts, the migrant people huddle in their tents, and think the rain will soon be over. But as the puddles form, they have to build little dikes around the tents. "And then the little dikes washed out and the water came inside, and the streams wet the beds and the blankets. The people sat in wet clothes. They set up boxes and put planks on the boxes. Then, day and night, they sat on the blanks." (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 511) They can do nothing but to wait for the rainstorm stopping. When at last the people have to move, the ignition wires and carburetors of their cars have been fouled by water, so the people have to wade away, carrying their wet blankets in their arms. "They splashed along, carrying the children, carrying the very old, in their arms. And if a barn stood on high ground, it was filled with people, shivering and hopeless." (ibid 511) Then gradually the greatest terror of all comes along. They cannot find any work for three months. In the barns, "The people sat huddles together; and the terror came over them, and their faces were gray with terror. The children cried with hunger, and there was no food...Then the sickness comes, pneumonia, and measles that go to the eyes and to the mastoids." (ibid511)

As the rain falls steadily, the water begins to flow over the highways for the culverts could not carry the water.

“Then from the tents, from the crowded barns, groups of sodden men went out, their clothes slopping rags, their shoes muddy pulp. They splashed out through the water, to the towns, to the country stores, to the relief offices, to beg for food, to cringe and beg for food, to beg for relief...to beg for rotting vegetables, to steal when they could.” (ibid 511-512)

Hunger and terror have made them lose their dignity, reducing them to thieves and even robbers. But the sheriffs send more deputies and new rifles to depress the refugees. In the cold world, people's lives become meaningless, and they just can't control their own lives.

2.2 Determination of Social Environment

Naturalists believe that in the modern society man is destined to tragedy because of the heredity and determination of the hostile environment, so man is always driven by forces beyond their control. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joads are always confused with their tough situation, and find that they have no choice but suffer. In this part, dark forces from the society that are beyond the control of human beings are illustrated in details.

2.2.1 Unemployment and Poverty

Due to the development of the capitalism and industrialization after the Civil War, advanced machines were applied in farmings, so large numbers of farmers lost their land, on which they lived for generations.

In the novel, the owners of the land, as spokesmen of the new policy of the nation, come to drive away the farmers because the tenant system won't work any more. But even the owners also do this beyond their will, for “all of them were caught in something larger than themselves,” and “as the Bank or the Company were

a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them,” because “they were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time.” When the tenants think the bank is made by men, they are wrong. The owners tell them, “The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men. It’s the monster. Men made it, but they can’t control it.” When the tenants think they can resist, there are the sheriff, and then the troops. They will become thieves if they try to stay, they will be murderers if they kill to stay. The monster isn’t men, but it can make men do what it wants. “But if we go, where’ll we go? How’ll we go? We got no money.” The poor farmers just don’t know at all where their fate will belong to. Men become so insignificant before the huge machines.

“The tractors came over the roads and into the fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. They crawled over the ground, laying the track and rolling on it and picking it up. Diesel tractors, puttering while they stood idle; they thundered when they moved, and then settled down to a droning roar. Snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through door-yards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses.” (ibid 40-41)

In this paragraph, the tractor is just like a huge insect that is much stronger than human beings. It can wrench the little house from its foundation and make the house crushed like a bug, and it can destroy everything but nothing can impede it. It seems that there is a kind of invisible force that makes men helpless in front of it. The whole life of the poor is overwhelmed by horror, and what’s worse, they don’t know how to get rid of it. They just become robots and are blind about what they do.

“The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat. The thunder of the cylinders sounded through the country, became one with the

air and the earth, so that earth and air muttered in sympathetic vibration. The driver could not control it—straight across country it went, cutting through a dozen farms and straight back. A twitch at the controls could swerve the cat', but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractor, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him—goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, muzzled his protest." (ibid 41)

Man has created such a machine, but now they cannot control it, which stands for the oppressive forces from the society. Just like the driver in the tractor, though he can switch its direction at a twitch, he cannot do this because the monster that sends the tractor has dominated his hand and his mind, leaving him no free choice. Of course, the poor farmers also suffer from such a curse of the monsters. Most of the tenants need to leave their land because one man on a tractor can do the work of twelve or fourteen families, paying him a wage and taking all the crops. Thus fifteen or twenty families cannot eat at all for the three dollars a day of the driver, and unfortunately, they cannot find who to blame, as we can see in the conversation between the tenants and the driver. When the tenants want to shoot the driver, the driver tells them it's not their fault, because they get orders from the person who gets their orders from the president of the banks that get the order from the East. At last, they find there is no body to shoot, because maybe the thing isn't men at all. So what they can do is to witness their home become a mess.

As victims of the monster, the poor tenants have to leave their land and struggle for living. In the little houses the tenant people sift their belongings and the belongings of their fathers and of their grandfathers, and pick over their possessions for the journey to the west. They sell things that can be sold, discard and burn things that they cannot take along. What they can see is a broken life, and what they cannot see is suffering in the future. But there is not enough time to decide what to take and what to abandon, for they have to get out quickly. And then frantically they load up the cars and drive away as though from the terror behind.

When they reach California, the Joads first stay in a place called Hooverville,

hoping they can find work there and settle down. But later they find that they cannot find work at all, for it isn't the season to pick grapes or cotton. Some migrants have been searching around for three weeks in vain. So both adults and their children are starving. Many children die from a disease called black-tongue coming from not getting good things to eat. The fear of hunger and the hunger itself flood among the migrants. Then they are told that prunes and pears are ripe to pick in a place called Santa Clara Valley in the north. But they are not sure whether they can find job there because so many people are desperate in finding jobs, while jobs are limited. Unfortunately, before they can reach the north, they are driven somewhere else. Then they get to a place called Weedpatch and lived in the camp. Everybody goes out everyday to find jobs but they can find none. Then they are told that Hooper rank needs workers to pick peaches, so they immediately go there and all get down to picking peaches at full stream. Even this, the pay of a day's work of seven members is barely enough for a dinner.

Then they learn from placards on the road and orange-colored handbills that cotton pickers are wanted. But so many migrants rush to pick cotton that they can work for only several days and leave no work to do in the next days. When winter comes they can not find work at all in California until next spring.

After losing land on which the poor farmers depend on for a living, they become unemployed. Though they can find work through various hardships, they will become unemployed again soon. What are left to them are hunger, disease and poverty, and an unpredictable fate.

2.2.2 Oppression and Discrimination

Naturalists believe that living in a cold world, man is the victim of society and often struggled in vain. The Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest becomes the chief concern of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck has a strong belief in the natural sciences and uses Darwin's theory of evolution to show how human beings are changed by the external factors and forced to adapt to the conditions surrounding them.

During the period of finding jobs, the Joads suffer much bitterness due to the

oppression and discrimination from the different social groups. First they are driven by the bank, which stands for the dominating force of the society, and have to leave their beloved home, where they preserve the memory of life. When they reach the boundary of California, they are expelled by the local policemen. "Well, you ain't in your country now. You're in California, an' we don't want you goddamn Okies settlin' down." (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 251) They learn from some men who just want to leave California that things are not as good as what they have thought. Much land is deserted and if the migrants plant a little corn in it, they will be sent to jail. Just as several men returning from California say:

"People gonna have a look in their eye. They gonna look at you an' their face says, 'I don't like you, you son-of-bitch.' Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside, an' they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's face how they hate you."... "Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-bitch. Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it." (ibid 241)

Here the migrants are excluded from the social circles of California. They cannot find steady work, and are scorned by the employers, so they have to leave Hooverville and move to another place. As the migrants become more and more on the highway, the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country of the West gather to defend themselves, and think themselves good and the invaders bad. They say these goddamned Okies are dirty, ignorant, and degenerate. They are thieves, and will steal anything. Not only the migrant workers are looked down upon, but also their children are despised by other children in the Hooper farmland. They are called Okies, so both Ruthie and Winfield won't go to school.

Oppressed by the local policemen and discriminated by the local people, the migrants have no choice but discontent and angry with their present situation. So they decide to defend themselves, but all what they do prove futile. Though the tenants are reluctant to leave their hometown, they are too weak to fight against the bank and machines. So they are forced to move to California.

In Hooverville, the migrants find that there is a lot of deserted land, on which Jimson weeds grow, and on which they can grow good crops if they own a little piece of it. So some of them creep on the land and clear a piece, trying like a thief to steal a little richness from the earth, and cultivate gardens hidden in the weeds, growing carrot, turnip, and potato. But before the crops become ripe, the deputy finds them. Then the little green carrot tops are kicked off, the turnip greens trampled, and the migrants driven away. Their paper houses and weed-thatched huts were burnt and they have to look for another Hooverville and suffer the same thing. As long as they camped in one place, there will be deputy sheriff shoving them along, making people scared of them. When the migrants try to resist, they will be sent to jail, and listed in the so-called "blacklist". Their pictures will be sent all over the place, and then they can't get work anywhere. If they have kids, things will get worse. So when they see the cops, they have better pretend to be dumb, knowing or understanding nothing for the cops like them being fools. Beating the cops means suicide. In a dispute with the contractor, Casy, the preacher, is put in prison. The migrants attempt to protest the low payment but are treated as the reds, and are suppressed by the cops. After Casy is released from the jail, he meets Tom by chance, but is beat to death before long, and Tom is injured severely in the fighting. In order not to be arrested by the cops, he hides in bushes, daring not to return to the family.

All the resistance ends up in failure for the migrants. They still have no free choice but to subject to the cruel reality. In a society of "survival of the fittest", the group of people is too weak to survive.

Chapter Three Naturalistic Writing Characteristics in *the Grapes of Wrath*

Naturalists believe in the Law of Jungle, that is to say, survival of the fittest. In the cruel society, the weak are not suitable to live. In the naturalistic works, characters are often from the lower class, with dreams to live a better life, but eventually fail. The naturalistic writers began to care about the ordinary life of the poor, and they narrate pains in reality very frankly. These naturalistic characteristics can also be found in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

3.1 Describing the Lower Class

Pizer points out that the naturalist populates his novels primarily with individuals from the lower class. The literary naturalists insist on writing about the poor and the unfortunate and presenting the characters of the low social and economic classes who are dominated by their environment and heredity.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck does not choose the very rich or the middle class as his characters. In fact, nearly all the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* are common and insignificant persons. Steinbeck draws upon the life of the common men and women for his materials and inspirations. The Joads are ordinary people and ordinary migrant workers. Their dream is common. Their behavior is not special. Everything for them is ordinary. The Joads and other migrants are poor, uneducated, and unsophisticated. They are not capable and wise. They are endowed with no remarkable attributes at all. With little education, they speak in the vernacular and slangs. Whether it is members of the Joads and the preacher Casy, or the shopkeepers of the stands selling food along Highway 66, or the owners of the second-hand cars, or the enormous number of migrants, they are all from the lowest walk of the society, hoping to make a living by humble jobs. The sufferings of the Joads are just a miniature of the disaster in the whole country.

As is well-known, naturalists mainly stress the helplessness of man, his insignificance in the cold world, and lack of dignity in face of environment.

Naturalists believe that individuals are little more than “human beast” in the world, completely at the mercy of the potentially destructive external forces, which they can never understand or control. John Steinbeck emphasizes the society’s dehumanizing force and indicates the powerlessness of the lowly and animal-like state of man by the employment of animal images in his works *The Grapes of Wrath*.

For instance, one ragged man tells the Joads, “...I can’t tell ya about them little fellas layin’ in the tent with their bellies puffed out an’ jus’ skin on their bones, an’ shiverin’ an’ whinin’ like pups...” (ibid 223) Here the poor sick kids are compared to pups. The cars of the migrant people mainly travel on road 66. “In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water.” (ibid 227) “And the roads were crowded with men ravenous for work, murderous for work.” “On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food.” (ibid 334) When the migrants want to grow some crops in the land deserted, the deputy sheriff will shoot them like rats. They are driven from one place to another, so “...in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work” (ibid 280). One of the migrants, Floyd says, “I been scrabbin’ over this here State tryin’ to work hard enough and move fast enough to get meat an’ potatoes for me an’ my wife an’ my kids. I’ve run myself like a jackrabbit an’---I can’t quite make it.” (ibid 301) When the cops come to burn their huts, they will go hide down the willows and then come out to build another weed shack if the cops go away. They are just like gophers. But the cops just treat burning the shack as bad weather. When the families try to camp together, just like Casy, the preacher, says, “they druv us like pigs. Scattered us. Beat the hell outa fellas. Druv us like pigs. They run you in like pigs, too.” (ibid 452) Even working a day in Hooper ranch, the Joads haven’t got enough food, so at the supper, “they ate silently, wolfishly, and wiped up the grease with the bread. The children retired into the corner of the room, put their plates on the floor, and knelt in front of the food like little animals.” (ibid 447)

As the forerunner of naturalism, Emile Zola says, human beings are “human beasts”. Man is often reduced to a weak and incompetent animal, and man himself can not master his own fate. In the cruel society, the Joads can’t escape from the

destination of being treated as animals, losing their dignity completely.

3.2 Pursuing Total Objectivity

The naturalist writers report the life of the hopeless people truthfully and objectively. They write their novels with a passion for the scientific accuracy. There are a lot of factual details in their works. They paint life as it is lived in the slums, and are blamed of telling just the ugly side of it. The writers let the characters develop as they are without much interference. Pizer notes in *American Realism and Naturalism*, "The common belief is that naturalists were like the realists into their fidelity to the details of contemporary life but that they depicted everyday life with a greater sense of the role of such causal forces as heredity and environment in determining behavior and belief" (Pizer 68). The famous critic Ernest Marchant thought the naturalistic literature does not think highly of art, but presents the social reality through imagination or in the way of taking pictures. Thus the naturalistic works refuses sacrifice of the reality due to the concern of art (Marchand 6).

According to V.L.Parrinton, naturalists treat the subject matter objectively and frankly, study three strongest instincts---hunger, fear, and sex of human beings, and seek truth in the spirit of the scientist; they just record what happens and take a bias in selecting materials, so in naturalistic works life is a trap and mean to human beings; the naturalists commonly choose characters from those who are victimized in a mechanical world. Besides, a philosophy of determinism is the vital principle of naturalism (Parrinton 325-326).

The Grapes of Wrath once has been called "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the Great Depression" for its faithful representation of social reality at that time. Unlike the traditional realistic novels that pay great attention to the depiction of figures and arrangement of plots, *The Grapes of Wrath* represents the story to us by the frank description of the dreary scenes and experience of characters, and Steinbeck attempts to lay bare the bitter life of the migrant workers by total objectivity. So at the beginning of the appearance of the novel, some critics thought that the characters in it are those without personality and the inner world.

There are 30 chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath* and 16 chapters are direct description of the situation of the society. The intercalary between the narrative chapters offer an objective background of the whole story. In the intercalary chapters, Steinbeck narrates frankly the story of the Joads and the relative people without any moral judgment, just like a biologist describing the sample he is watching. It is the sober, objective, and dispassionate narrating tone that makes the characters and the story genuine and believable.

For instance, in chapter one, Steinbeck provides a tragic atmosphere through direct description of the Dust Bowl and the drought. In chapter five, the author depicts how the owners of the land try to persuade the tenants to leave their land and how the huge tractors destroy the houses without comment. In chapter twelve, situation of the migrants on the Highway 66 is presented as it is. They flee from different areas of the country and poured into Highway 66, having to suffer from many difficulties on the road. In chapter fourteen, Steinbeck describes the change and disorder in the western land. The western land owners sink into panic because they are threatened by growing labor unity. In chapter nineteen, how the migrants are depressed is vividly presented in front of the readers. They scramble for jobs, and food, being prevented from growing their own crops. In chapter twenty one, Steinbeck gives a detail description of how the migrants are eager to find a job and how the big companies deal with the poor migrants by force. In chapter twenty five, the author objectively depicts the disappointing pictures of California. For the migrants, California is no longer a paradise but a terrible place flooded with unemployment, disappointment, and chaos.

Naturalists often emphasize the details, which are important in expressing objectivity, so does Steinbeck. Through the details, we know the rude aspect of the uneducated people and the hideous society. Steinbeck's objectivity can be reflected in the unflattering language that is used to describe the harsh environment. For instance, after the farmers are driven out of their land, leaving their houses empty, the great writer writes,

"When the folks left, and the evening of the first day came, the hunting cats

slouched in from the fields and mewed on the porch. And when no one came out, the cats crept through the empty rooms. And then they went back to the fields and were wild cats from then on, hunting gophers and field mice, and sleeping in ditches in the daytime. When the night came, the bats, which had stopped at the doors for fear of light, swooped into the houses and sailed about through the empty rooms, and in a little while they stayed in dark room corners during the day, folded their wings high, and hung head-down among the rafters, and the smell of their droppings was in the empty houses. And the mice moved in and stored wet seeds in corners, in boxes, in the backs of drawers in the kitchens. And weasels came in to hunt the mice, and the brown owls flew shrieking in and out again.” (ibid 135)

Here Steinbeck presents the bleak scene of the empty houses in unpleasant language. The natural environment in *The Grapes of Wrath* is no longer like that in the age of Wordsworth, in which nature is the spiritual homeland of human mind; it has gone and will never return. In describing the poor living condition of the migrants in Hooverville, Steinbeck tells us that

“The rag town lay choose to water, and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile...if he had no tent, he went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper. And when the rains came the house melted and washed away.”(ibid 276)

In Chapter twenty five, John Steinbeck gives us a vivid description of the situations in California without exaggeration. Steinbeck depicts the season of growth in California at first:

“...Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea. ...all California quickens with produce, and the fruit grows heavy, and the limbs bend gradually under the fruit so that crutches must be placed under them to support the weight.and in the growing year the prunes lengthen like green bird’s eggs, and the hard little pears take shape, and the beginning of the fuzz comes out on the peaches. The

hard little beads become green buttons, and the buttons grow heavy..." (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 409)

It seems that a bumper harvest is anticipated in California, but the situation turns out to be the opposite. When the cherries are ripe, and only sold a half a pound, the owners think the price is too low to meet the payment of the workers, so they let the cherries eaten by birds and wasps, and drop unto the ground. Then the purple prunes soften and sweeten. For the price of the prunes is also too low, so no matter how low the wages, the owners won't hire workers to pick them. As a result, swarms of flies come to feast, and the valley is filled with the odor of sweet decay. When the owners think it is unworthy to sell pears five dollars a ton, they let pears fall heavily to the ground and splash on the ground. Good grapes, rotten grapes, wasp-stung grapes, and even dirty grapes are put together to make wine.

So the decay spreads over the State, and the sweet smell is a great sorrow on the land. "Man who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten, and the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow." (ibid 411) To keep up the price, they destroy the fruits and trees, which are the saddest and bitterest thing. Lots of oranges are dumped on the ground and become rotten, but people are prevented from picking them. Coffee is used for fuel in the ships; corn is burned to keep warm; potatoes are thrown into rivers; pigs are slaughtered and buried into the earth.

"The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. And they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to putrefying ooze." (ibid 411)

Here how the fruits grow ripe and then get rotten while the poor workers are prevented from picking them, and how the food like potatoes and corn is destroyed

or burned while migrants have no right to have them give the reader an infuriating scene. All the true and direct writing about the society provides a real background to the misery of the farmers who have lost their land.

At the end of novel, when the migrants are trapped in flood, we can see such miserable pictures:

...Frantic men pounded on the doors of the doctors; and the doctors were busy. And sad men left word at country stores for the coroner to send a car. The coroners were not too busy. The coroners' wagons backed up through the mud and took out the dead (ibid 512).

...In the wet hay of leaking barns babies were born to women who panted with pneumonia. And old people curled up in corners and died that way, so that the coroners could not straight them. At night the frantic men walked boldly to hen roosts and carried off the squawking chickens. If they were shot at, they did not run, but splashed sullenly away; and if they were hit, they sank tiredly in the mud (ibid 512).

People are so helpless that they do not care whether they can be shot to death, for maybe death is a relief of them. So Steinbeck never saves his energy in exposing the poor conditions of the migrants. With such unpolished writing style, Steinbeck succeeds in revealing the evil aspects in the chaotic world. As he says in the novel, "there is a crime that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all the success." (ibid 411)

3.3 Orientating Survival Subject

Naturalism holds the view that the fate of people is determined by the fact beyond the control of their will and choice. Naturalism takes clues from Charles Darwin's "the fittest survive." Thus, men faced with the tough situation or challenge in a jungle, are mere animals of a higher rank. It is also the characterized feature of naturalism that we could not find any moral lessons or ethical comments from the naturalistic works. For the above reasons, we could always notice cruelty, bloodshed

or deep passion or sorrow in the naturalistic works. The works tend to be tragedies or pessimistic, expressing the things or feelings human beings could not control. Charles C. Walcutt thinks that natural rules and social and economic influence are far stronger than human's will, and survival is the highest law of the world of living things, and then involves into the emotion, motivation, and conflict of all men. It is because nature causes the competition of survival among human life that life must be full of violence, a kind of "cruel fight" (Walcutt 20-21).

The society in *The Grapes of Wrath* is just like a jungle, where there is always violence and the weak is always disadvantaged. As Muley, one of the characters in the novel, says,

"I was mean like a wolf. Now I'm mean like a weasel. When you're huntin' somepin you're a hunter, an' you're strong. Can't nobody beat a hunter. But when you get hunted—that's different. Somepin happens to you. You ain't strong maybe you're fiece, but you ain't strong. I been hunted now for a log time. I ain't a hunter no more."
(Steinbeck "The Grapes of Wrath" 66)

Here Steinbeck gives the reader a vivid description of the Law of Jungle, in which the weak are the prey of the strong. Just like the hunter and the game, the strong will survive in the hunting.

After the Joads leave their home, Grandpa dies of disease and Grandma dies of tiredness when they go across the desert. They are so weak that they can not survive in the world, the "promised land", California

"Once belonged to Mexico and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in. And such was their hunger for land that they took the land...took the grants and broke them up and growled and quarreled over them, those frantic hungry men; and they guarded with guns the land they had stolen." (ibid 272)

When survival becomes the most important in life, human beings will use all means to fight for a living. California is thought to be a free country by the migrants,

and they can go anywhere they want. But the truth is that the border patrol on the California line and the policemen from Los Angeles will stop them and turn them back. They won't accept the migrants if they cannot buy the real estate. When the migrants are asked to take out their driver's license, the police will tear it up and deny they own a driver's license, thus preventing them from migrating to California legally. When the migrants want to find a fixed place to live, they are often driven away by the local police with tents burnt, and when they want to grow some vegetables, even furtively, they are stopped. The great owners attack the Hooverville, send deputy swaggering through the ragged camp, and use every little means and violence to torture the migrants.

When the migrants get to California, they become fierce because of hungry. They have hoped to find a home, but they find only hatred.

"The owners hate them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry...and in the towns, the storekeepers hated them because they had no money to spend...the town men, little bankers, hated Okies because there was nothing to gain from them. They had nothing. And the laboring people hated Okies because a hungry man must work, and if he must work, if he has to work, the wage payer automatically gives him less for his work; and then no one can get more." (ibid 275)

From the above passage we can see life has become a fight for survival, so the migrants are hated, looked down upon and even insulted by the local people. Driven by the deputy sheriff, they can not find a fixed place to live. The most disappointing thing is that it is very difficult to find a job. They learn from a man from California that the wages are low and life is hard there. They don't believe this at the outset, but soon experience all the pain being told. If the employers want workers, they will send handbills to the poor migrants several times more than the actual demand. Just as one of the workers says that maybe the employer needs two hundred men, he will talk to five hundred or more, and when the workers get to the place, there are a thousand men. Thus the limited work and the limited payment are distributed to too

many workers, so at last the workers only get very little money. Then there must be people who feel dissatisfied with this and refuse to do the job, but there are still people who are starving, and will do the work as long as they are provided bread. The more workers are hired, the hungrier they are, and the less money the employers pay, the more benefits they get, thus the poorer the workers become.

The Situation in California is totally unfavorable for the migrants to survive, and apart from this, the poor migrants often face violence for the cruel local people form units and squads, and arm themselves with clubs, gas, and guns. When they want to resist, they will come across the destructive suppression because money that may have gone to wages goes for gas, guns, agents and spies, blacklists, and drilling.

Instead of idealizing the lives of the common folk, Steinbeck focuses on the brutal and ugly aspects of the lower class people or their difficult and often sordid lives. The Joads are no doubt an epitome of all the migrants that are involved in the struggle of survival. At the disadvantageous position, they are too weak to find a way to live a decent life, and have to be reduced to the animal-like states. At the end of the novel, the whole family is at the mercy of the hostile environment, without knowing their destiny.

3.4 Pessimistic Outlook

According to the famous critic Donald Pizer, “all the creation of naturalism can be reflected mainly in the tragedy in the works” (Fang 122). Naturalism is featured by fatalism and pessimism, so naturalistic fictions are always end in tragedy, as can be seen in those classic works like *Sister Carrie* and *An Tragedy of America*, and the tone of the naturalistic writings is often ironic, pessimistic, and even desperate. The literary naturalists think that the true reality is not found in the smiling aspects of the middle-class life. The reality is found when the forces of nature are most powerful in checking human desires, in keeping human from accomplishing their dreams. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck presents a disappointing society and narrates a bitter journey of the Joads to the west, also a process of the disillusion of dreams step by step.

When the whole Oklahoma is enveloped by dust and drought, making crops withered and farmers gloomy, the farmers are driven away by the owners of the land because all the land is controlled by the bank and company. The tractor driver is regardless of pain of his town fellows and becomes very selfish because he can get three dollars a day for pushing down houses of the farmers. Banks and companies are ruthless to the tenants because they are driven by the desire for money and benefits. Property becomes master of men, but the tenants can do nothing to change the situation, and difficulties fill in every step of their effort. It seems that misfortunes are always waiting for the migrants next day or even at next moment.

Almost all the farmers decide to move to California, but there are still some left, like Muley. However, he will end “a damn ol’ graveyard ghos”, which is rather sad. Without the farmers, the house are left vacant on the land, and “when the motor of a tractor stops, it is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it like the living heat leaves a corpse.”(Steinbeck 132) Here Steinbeck presents the reader a cold and lifeless world. After selling their properties and buying an old truck, the Joads join in the group heading to west. They have to suffer from their truck breaking down from time to time and the expensive fees for mending the truck. Thus “the fears that had once apprehended drought or flood now lingered with anything that might stop the westward crawling.” (ibid 230) Their thought and planning have gone out of field and go to the roads, to the distance, to the west. Their mind that has been bound with acres now lives with narrow concrete miles. However, highway 66 has brought them not what they want, but endless disasters. They have to come across lands, mountains, and deserts in order to reach California, which turns out to be a place of disappointment, because the migrants can not get rid of the hardships. To show the breath-snatching desperation in the so-called “promised land”, Steinbeck writes like this: “The decay spreads over the State, and the sweet smell is a great sorrow on the land...and the smell of rot fills the country...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.” (ibid 411) What the Joads earn is hardly enough for a good meal, let alone a better life, and every resistance will end in failure. At last, when the Joads are wrapped in the flood and

Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn baby, all the hopes are gone.

In the novel, Steinbeck also puts emphasis to the description of the setting sun to highlight the pessimistic atmosphere. For instance, when Tom returns to home, his family has already moved away, leaving the house a mess. Here Steinbeck writes like this: "The sun had lowered until it came through the angled end windows now, and it flashed on the edges of the broken glass." (Steinbeck 48) When Muley complains about their miserable condition, we can see such a sight: "a large red drop of sun lingered on the horizon and then dripped over and was gone, and the sky was brilliant over the spot where it had gone, and a torn cloud, like a bloody rag, hung over the spot of its going." (Steinbeck 55) At the moment of the Joads' leaving, the setting sun appears again, making "the earth bloody in its setting light" (Steinbeck 110). No matter it is the "broken glass", the "bloody rag" or the "bloody earth", depression and pessimistic feeling are clearly seen.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, like other naturalists, Steinbeck leaves to the readers the conclusion that men are always hopeless and helpless in front of the cruel environment, and a better life has nothing to do with the poor migrants. It seems that the migrants will never get rid of their misfortunes and whatever they do they will end in failure.

Chapter Four Unique American Naturalism in *The Grapes of Wrath*

The famous critics Donald Pizer notes in his *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* that:

The naturalistic novel usually contains two tensions or contradictions, and... The two comprise both an interpretation of experience and a particular aesthetic recreation of experience. The first tension is that between the subject matter of the naturalistic novel and the concept of man which emerges from this subject matter. The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class...His fictional world is that of the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence, as we ourselves usually conceive of our lives. But the naturalist discovers in this world those qualities of man usually associated with the heroic or adventurous, such as acts of violence and passion which involve sexual adventure or bodily strength and which culminate in desperate moments and violent death. A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature. The second tension involves the theme of the naturalistic novel. The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is that between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, puzzling truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise (Pizer 10-11).

Based on the particular social and economic situation, although it is greatly influenced by the European naturalism, American naturalism has its own features. According to Furst, American naturalism grows in direct response to the native social and economic problems and the struggle of the poor with the capitalists are

always the theme of the naturalist writings. "In this way American naturalism owes much to local factors than to outside influences, and it is worth recalling the so-called 'local color' tendencies of the 1870s and 1880s which carried on into naturalism, though with certain shifts of emphasis." (Furst 34)

In the American naturalistic works, we can surely see that human beings are controlled and destroyed by the irresistible social forces with their destiny unknown, but we can also feel the self-value in their inner world, the strong desire to reach self-realization in front of the cruel reality, and their potential ability in the longing for a bright future (Zhang & Yang 32). Though characters in the naturalistic works realize how small they are in the hostile world, and their struggle will end in futile, they refuse to give in. Based on the special American environment, the American naturalists write from a unique angle.

4.1 Survival Dreams in the Plight

America is a glorious country with only 200 hundred years' history. To get free from the persecution of the Church of England and to live a better life, the early ancestors came to the continent. Since the arrival of the English people in a ship called May Flower in 1620, a new world began to be established. As a young and prosperous country, America has created a miracle. America is a fresh land, a new beginning, an opportunity, and a new world forever. In the growing process of America, American dream formed. It is the dream that people believe they can succeed through hard work. *The Declaration of Independence* is the ideological basis of the American dream, in which it reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." (<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>) The American dream appears in different forms in different age, but it contains the same spiritual connotation--- optimism and hope, which represents the American faith and concept, and it is also the unique American idea and way of act, and the permanent source of the country's development. Such a spirit can be also found in *The Grapes of Wrath*,

and it is reflected specifically in the land dream and home dream.

After losing their home and land, the Joads become bankrupt. Hunger and poverty hunt in everyone's life, so the whole family begins their bitter journey to California. Though they are sad, they still have the dream of finding jobs and living a good life. Just as what Ma says,

...Even if they wouldn't let you eat none, you could maybe snatch a little ratty one sometimes. An' it'd be nice under the trees, workin' in the shade... (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 104)

...I'd like to think how nice it's gonna to be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place, an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses nicest among the orange trees. In wonder ---that is, if we all get jobs an' all work--- maybe we can get one of them little white houses. An' the little fellas go out an' pick oranges right off the tree... (ibid 105)

Grandpa also has his dream. "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." (ibid 107) They have thought that California is a charming city with the picturesque scenery and pleasant weather, and they can live very happily there through their hard work. One of the migrants, Wilson says,

"She's worth it...I seen han'bills how they need folks to pick fruits, an' good wages. Why, jus' think how it's gonna be, under them shady trees a-pickin' fruit an' takin' a bite ever' once in a while. Why, hell, they don't care how much you eat 'cause they got so much, an' with them good wages, maybe a fellatio can get hisself a little piece a land an' work out for extra cash. Why, hell, in a couple years I bet a fella could have a place of his own." (ibid 172)

Though all of the migrants have got the yellow handbills, and the migrants are so many, maybe more than wanted, they still hope getting a job in California for they think that "This is jus' one little part a California. That's the secon' biggest State we

got. S'pose they did get all them eight hundred. They's plenty place else." (ibid173)
For them, as long as there is a glimmer of hope, they will try their best to strive for it. Disasters have made them homeless, but their land dream doesn't vanish. And they still believe they can establish another home in California.

In chapter nineteen, we can see clearly how the migrants' land dream:

...The wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined; the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and converted: the good fields with water to be dug for, the good green fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat. A man might look at a fallow field and know, and see in his mind that his own bending back and his own straining arms would bring the cabbages into the light, and the golden eating corn, the turnips and carrots.

And a homeless hungry man could look at the fallow fields which might produce food but not profit, and that man could know how a fallow field is a sin and the unused land a crime against the thin children. And such a man drove along the roads and knew temptation at every field, and knew the lust to take these fields...the fields goaded him, and the company ditches with good water flowing were a goad to him (ibid 275).

Here we can see how deep the farmers love the land and how eager they want to own a piece of land. They believe they can make a better life if they have the opportunity to work. If they are given an acre of the land and grow some potatoes, they can create enough food for the family.

Rose of Sharon once dreams that:

Connie gonna get a job in a store or maybe a fact'ry. An' he's gonna study at home, maybe radio, so he can git to be a expert an' maybe later have his own store. An' we'll go to pitchers whenever. An' Connie says I'm gonna have a doctor when the baby's born; an' he says we'll see how times is, an' maybe I'll go to a hospiddle. An' we'll have a car, little car.....an' we'll live in town an' go to pitchers whenever, an'---well, I'm gonna have a'lactric iron, an' the baby'll have new stuff. Connie says all new

stuff---white an'---well, you seen in the catalogue all they got for a baby. Maybe right at first while Connie's studin' at home it won't be so easy, but---well, when the baby comes, maybe he'll be all done studyin' an' we'll have a place, little bit of a place. We don't want nothin' fancy, but we want it nice for the baby." (ibid 192)

This is a dream of owning a nice little family, a home dream, and a longing for the future. The young couple believe they can improve their life gradually through hard work. From the above analysis we can see the migrants' aggressive spirit against difficulties. Though they know how rough the way to success will be, they try their best to reach the goal.

4.2 Goodness of American Lower Class

In the Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Steinbeck said:

The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults, with dredging up to light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement. Furthermore, the writer 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...I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication or any membership in literature (Steinbeck 1962).

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, we can find "gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love" besides despair and tragedy. Steinbeck has written to his publisher to state that the drive for his whole work has been aimed at making people understand each other. From what he said, we can see that Steinbeck write this book to arouse people's sense of cooperation and caring for others.

In the novel we can also find the human goodness and sympathy embodied in the migrants as a big family. On the way to California the Joads encounter the Wilsons who offer their mattress for Grandpa to take a rest when Grandpa is severely ill, and

then Grandpa is buried in one of the Wilsons' blankets. When Ma Joad thanks them for their help, Mrs. Wilson says: "You shouldn't talk like that. We're proud to help. I ain't felt so—safe in a long time. People needs—to help." (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 165) Then Al and Tom decide to fix the car for the Wilsons and the Joads promise to care for Mrs. Wilson. What Al and Mae, two workers in a hamburger shop on Highway 66 do shows a moving story of the goodness among the poor people. A poor father gets to the shop with his son to buy a ten cents' loaf, which costs at least fifteen cents, but Al sells it at ten cents though they may get no benefit. And Mae sells two candies at the price of a penny which turns out to be a nickel one piece. Then two truck drivers leave two coins on the counter, not taking their change. What they do show the great sympathy to others.

On the sides of Highway 66, the migrants will gather into a big family at night:

The twenty families became one family; the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundreds people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awestruck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family which the night before had been lost and fearful might search its goods to find a present for a new baby. They grew to be units of the camps (Steinbeck "*The Grapes of Wrath*" 227).

Due to the poor living condition, many children die of diseases or hunger. At this time, "all hands went into pockets and little coins came out. In front of the tent a little heap of silver grew." (ibid 281) When Winfield is sick because of eating too many peaches, a strange worker takes him home, and in the Hooverville Camp, where violence, hunger and selfishness are the most common things, Ma shows her kindness when she is surrounded by a crowd of children who watch with hungry eyes as she prepares a meal for the family. Knowing that the food she has in her pot is insufficient to feed the family, not to mention the group of the thin, hungry and strange children, she tries to compromise, because she can't bear to let the children eat nothing. After ladling out reduced portions to the family she leaves the residue in

the pot to the children.

In Weedpatch we can feel the warmth in a big family. The Weedpatch camp is maintained through organizations to achieve the group aims, and its operative unit is the committee. In Weedpatch the migrants share some facilities if they obey the principles there. What's more, they are not looked down upon any more, which make them decent men. The problem of the hungry children is resolved not by depriving one's own like that in Hooverville but by maintaining a camp fund which dispenses loans to those in need. In the Weedpatch government camp, where a family name Wallace invites Tom to eat breakfast and share their work with Tom, although this may cut their own meager earnings.

After finishing the work in the Hooper Ranch, the migrants get the job of picking cotton, and they gather in the camps near the river. They have realized the benefits of the group cooperation, so when threatened by the flood, the migrants help each other to build a dam to hold floodwaters out of the cotton-pickers' camp. In the boxcar, their temporary home, Mrs. Wainwright helps Ma in Rose of Sharon's delivery.

What Rose of Sharon does in the final scene of the novel marks the end of the story with great humanity. By the end of the novel, the Joads have reached the poorest condition of their lives: fleeing from the rains and flood that have destroyed their temporary shelter in a deserted boxcar, the remaining members of the family almost have nothing left. All that is left of the material world for them to give is breast milk. However, Rose of Sharon offers the only thing left---the most intimate gift to a strange man who is dying of starvation.

The ending has been criticized for the reason that it has little relation to the whole story, but Steinbeck has his own intention in thus ending the Joads' story. In a letter to Pascal Covici, explaining the reasons why he cannot change the ending, Steinbeck writes: "It is casual...It is a survival symbol, it must be an accident, it must be a stranger, and it must be quick. The fact that the Joads don't know him, don't care about him, have no ties to him—that is the emphasis." (Steinbeck, Elaine 211) The starving man in the barn exemplifies the downtrodden, hungry masses Tom has just vowed to save. By emphasizing Rose of Sharon's nursing a stranger, Steinbeck has highlighted trust, goodness, and sympathy among human beings. *The Grapes of*

Wrath moves not only along Highway 66 to tell a story of suffering, but also is a road of goodness and love.

4.3 Tragedy of 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 this novel, grape is a symbol of richness, and the original motive of the journey to California; it also represents the migrants, who hope to live a better life by picking fruits. Then, as the society makes the migrants desperate, and all the hopes and endeavors turn out to be a failure, the grapes of wrath are in fact the resentful migrants, and the tragedy of migrants.

There are few happy endings in the naturalistic fictions and *The Grapes of Wrath* is no exception. In this novel, things always go contrary to people's wishes, and reality is always disappointing. With hope and good plans the Joads head to California, only to find California is not a paradise but a hell-like place. Not only is the land dream lost, but also the dream of a whole family vanishes.

After losing their home and land, the Joads are told there is some work in California, and they can reach out anywhere and picked an orange. They have seen the handbills pass out, saying how much work there are, how high wages are, and how folks are wanted to come and picked grapes, oranges, and peaches. Thus at the beginning of the journey they are full of bright dreams of the distant city. But in such a cruel society, good wishes often come to nothing. Not until they reach California, do they find that things are not what they have thought.

With the destination drawing nearer and nearer, dreams become farther and farther until at last fall through. In the cruel world they live in, the human plans are so weak compared to the hostile forces of the environment. Human beings are so fragile and powerless against the natural or social power that their plans seldom get realized. There is always some change to hinder the way to an ideal living. The Joads are no

exception. With the handbills, they dream that they can get many high-wage jobs in California, but it turns out that this is fraud. The farm owners are so harsh to them that one day's hard work of the whole family cannot earn them a good meal. They hope to settle down, but they often move place to place not at their will. For several times, they are told they can find work somewhere, but when they get to the spot, they only find too many people are scrambling for one kind of work. Even if they can find work sometimes, it is just contemporary. As the migrant workers, the Joads are treated unfairly, oppressed by the farm owners, and local people are hostile towards them. They realize that California is not the place with white house, green grassland, and infinite fruits any more. Their dream of getting a piece of land by hard work has run out by the reality.

In this way, we can see that dream of the Joads is not only illusionary, but also deceptive. Sometimes it seems so easy to realize, but the dream will eventually turn out empty. That procedure seems to be following the pattern of a circle. Sometimes the dreams get near, and the possibility of realizing it has become higher, but soon the dream will go far again and crush all the hope and expectations people have cherished. No matter how it moves, people can seldom reach their targets, and their dreams can not be totally realized. This pattern repeats over and over again until finally people are exhausted.

Not only is the land dream lost, but also the dream of a whole family vanishes. On the way to the West, Grandpa passes away and leaves the family first. They are so poor that they have not enough money to hold a descent funeral for Grandpa and bury him like a pauper. And then Noah is fed up with the suffering, and goes down the river never to return to the family. When they are close to California, Grandma leaves them forever. In the fighting with the deputy sheriff, Casy is bitten to death; Tom has to hide in the willow woods and dares not to go home for he has wounded a cop. Connie is disappointed at the new place, and becomes afraid of the unknown future, so he leaves the family without saying a word, regardless of his pregnant wife, Rose of Sharon. Due to the long term malnutrition, overwork and depression, Rose of Sharon is heavily ill and gives birth to a stillborn baby. Despite Ma's brave efforts and bold protests, the family disintegrates. Even her immense determination

cannot save the family from falling apart.

At the end of the novel, with no work to do until next spring, and nowhere to go, the migrants live in the boxcar camp near a river. When they are threatened by the flood, men of the Joads are building a dike to stop the stream from rushing into their truck. Though they have been working extremely hard for a whole night, the dike is destroyed by the flood and all the people lose their last shelter. Though having tried their best, they can do nothing to change the current situation, and there is even no room for them to live in at last. In a world of "Survival of the fittest", the Joads are doomed to a tragic life.

Conclusion

As a versatile writer, Steinbeck has been given lots of labels, such as realist, mythical symbolist, naturalist, or even feminist, etc., with his writing not constant on one style. The study of *The Grapes of Wrath* in this thesis is based on the theory of naturalism, and the author hopes this will contribute a little to broadening the research scope in the overall study of Steinbeck. Through the demonstration of the core philosophy of naturalism---determinism in terms of social environment and natural environment, the examination of naturalistic writing characteristics employed in the novel, and the unique American naturalist connotations, this thesis interprets the naturalist elements in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

First, this thesis points out the determinism of naturalism embodied in *The Grapes of Wrath*, especially the deterministic influence of environment on the main characters' behavior and fate. Due to the harsh natural disasters like drought, dust bowl, and flood, the Joads live a life full of hardships. What's more, hostile social environment prevents them from improving their life. Wherever they go, they will face the unemployment, fighting for jobs, and discrimination from the local people. What they do is determined by the outer factors and their fate is also out of control. Second, in the novel, Steinbeck has employed several naturalistic writing characteristics to highlight the naturalistic theme. The first characteristic is his description of the lower class. The great novelist draws materials from the humble migrants who are bankrupted, and describes their bitter life during the Great Depression in 1930s. Then he plots his novel in total objectivity, which is the main feature of naturalism claimed by Zola. Steinbeck also emphasizes the subject of survival orientation in the novel, and presents the poor migrants' fighting for survival in such a cruel society, which derives from the "survival of the fittest" of Darwin. Steinbeck holds a pessimistic outlook in narrating the story of the Joads. Though they make great effort to improve their life, the Joads are reduced to a miserable situation at the end.

However, due to the specific background of the American history, besides the traditional French naturalism, Steinbeck also employs the unique connotations of

American naturalism in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In revealing the dark side of the society, Steinbeck also gives his praise to the poor migrants for their spirit in holding on to the dreams throughout his works. Steinbeck describes his characters as weak, helpless, determined, having no control over their lives, yet never deprives the men of their goodness. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, cooperation among the migrants and their caring for each other are also the highlight in Steinbeck's creation of the whole novel. Characters in the novel try their best to pursue dreams, but as individuals, they don't have the power to influence or change the reality. Therefore, they have to end in tragedy.

Through the study of the naturalist elements in the novel, this thesis has provided a deep comprehension of John Steinbeck and his *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the new development of the naturalism in America. Through the analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*, it is evident that this novel can be cast as a great naturalistic work, and John Steinbeck one of those great naturalistic writers. It is the frank and true description of the bitter life of the migrants during the Great Depression of 1930s that endows the novel a historic significance and makes the novel lasting.

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