

河北师范大学

硕士学位论文

约翰·斯坦贝克《愤怒的葡萄》当中的超验主义倾向

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## 摘 要

约翰·斯坦贝克是在美国 20 世纪 30 年代严重的经济危机的背景下诞生的最著名的小说家之一。他个人的生活经历使他有机会得以接触下层的劳动人民，尤其是农民和流动工人，生活是其写作的源泉。没有这种亲身的体验和感受，在美国文学史上就不可能有乔德一家的鲜明形象。《愤怒的葡萄》是斯坦贝克对美国文学的巨大贡献，被誉为美国文化中的一个里程碑。

小说描绘了中西部的破产农民，离乡背井，风餐露宿，向西迁移，寻求生路的凄惨景象。该作品以细腻的笔触描写了自然界的灾难，如干旱和沙尘暴，暴雨和洪水，以及人们的自私和道德的荒芜，从而揭示了自然与人类的关系，精神世界与物质世界的关系，个体与社会的关系，无论从自然景物描写到人物刻画，处处流露出作者曾受到美国超验主义影响的痕迹。小说通过人物的刻画，使人感受到超验主义提倡的人的潜力是无限的，只要积极向上，自尊，自信，自爱，自助，完善精神，就能推动社会的进步，激发人们积极生活的勇气，以及对社会的乐观期望。美国超验主义在成就这部史诗性作品上起了不可估量的影响作用。

本文共三章。第一章从分析宇宙精神无处不在，自然界是宇宙精神的外在反映入手，说明个体精神是宇宙精神的一部分，人能够依靠直觉从宇宙中得到真理，而个体精神只有和宇宙精神相容才神圣；第二章试图通过对自然界中的物体以及自然现象与人类关系的分析，说明自然界的象征意义；第三章通过对小说主要人物的成长过程的分析，说明社会的完善和进步离不开个人道德的完善和提高，而个人的提高是无止境的，从而表达了作者的民主思想以及对社会发展的乐观态度。本文旨在探讨美国超验主义的三个基本特征在小说中的体现。

关键词： 超验主义倾向      自然      精神      象征      自我完善

## Abstract

John Steinbeck (1902~1968), the winner of the 1940 Pulitzer Prize and the 1962 Nobel Prize, is well-known for his masterpiece — *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel is undoubtedly his best-known volume of fiction as well as, for most readers, his finest achievement as an author.

Heavily depending upon and profoundly influenced by the transcendental ideas, the author succeeds in revealing the relationship between spirit and nature. The purpose that the author describes natural calamity such as drought, dust-bowl, rain, flood and immorality of human beings is to make the readers feel that spirit is pervading everywhere in the universe and man can get enlightenment of God intuitively if he is close to nature. Nature is the symbol of spirit. And he also creates some principal characters such as Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Rose of Sharon and Ma to make the readers know individual divinity when communed to Oversoul, and in the process of their development, the promising future of society is foreseen. The author succeeds in demonstrating the transcendental philosophy that individual is the most important element to the regeneration of society, and self-perfection is infinite.

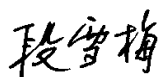
The novel is one of the masterpieces of American literature for its rich thoughts. Obviously, in writing the novel, the author takes transcendental ideas in mind. Therefore, what I want to demonstrate in this thesis is to do my utmost to explore the transcendental tendency that serves to make the novel one of the masterpieces of the world literature.

**Key words:** transcendental tendency   nature   spirit   symbol  
individual perfection

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本人所提交的学位论文《约翰·斯坦贝克〈愤怒的葡萄〉当中的超验主义倾向》，是在导师的指导下，独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，本论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。对本文的研究做出重要贡献的个人和集体，均已在文中标明。

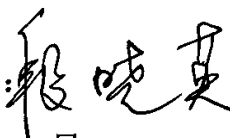
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# 学位论文原创性确认书

学生段雪梅所提交的学位论文《约翰·斯坦贝克〈愤怒的葡萄〉当中的超验主义倾向》，是在本人的指导下，由其独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，该论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。

指导教师（签名）：  
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## Introduction

*The Grapes of Wrath* may be called one of the most ambitious novels of John Steinbeck (1902-1968). Both his parents exerted great influence on him. Steinbeck's father never felt completely at home in an office setting and preferred being outdoors, whether working in his vegetable garden or riding his horse around the county. He passed this love for nature and the soil to his son and made certain that the younger John close to nature and devoted to nature, while his mother was gregarious and outspoken. She was will to becoming a social and community leader, and she passed to her son a gift for imagination and spirituality. It was she who ensured that the family home always contained diverse and abundant reading material; it was she who first introduced John Steinbeck to the myths and legends of Western literature and who encouraged him to explore the sensuousness and profundities of language. When he was young, he read a variety of books and received different ideas and thoughts from the books. He had announced an ambition to become a writer at the age of 14 and was insistent on taking only those courses relevant to his stated aspiration. In order to earn money for his continuing education with a series of odd jobs ranging from store clerk to cotton picker and ranch hand. From these work experiences, Steinbeck developed a deep appreciation and sympathy for the common laborer, which would prove seminal to his great works of the 1930s.

Some Steinbeck's critics say that two great historical and social phenomena converged in the thirties to make *The Grapes of Wrath* come into being. One of them is that in November 1933, a gigantic dust cloud rose over area of the United States stretching from Texas to South Dakota; it was a presage of the horror in store for mid-western and southwestern farmers. As the drought worsened, the topsoil of this region was lifted and blew away by the constant winds. More and more of the displaced residents of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and other Dust Bowl states moved west, which eventually send about three or four thousand Americans in search of a

new life, a new beginning, a re-creation, in California, the imagined Promised Land, where the dust never blows, and conditions for the migrants in California continued to be worsen. In 1936, John Steinbeck agreed to do a series of articles about migrant conditions in California for the *San Francisco News*. He came West with the migrants, lived in their camps, saw their pitiful brave highway communities, and the life beside the road. As he observed more, he was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with his newspaper articles about these migrants and decided to write a "big book" exposing the depth of suffering and oppression, a story of a human tragedy on a national scale.<sup>1</sup> On his west journey, he met Tom Collins, who managed several government camps to serve the migrants, and Collins offered detailed materials he needed for his writing. The other is that in process of industrialization of New England and with the development of capitalism, man is turning into nonhumans losing their personality and becoming selfish and merciless. The author wants to find some ways to deal with the social problems.

*The Grapes of Wrath* deals with a number of sociological, political, economic and agrarian aspects of an American family of Oklahoma in a particular time, the Great Depression of the thirties. It also deals with the inner life of the Joad family, their emotional, intellectual, ethical and spiritual state and its growth. It is obvious that John Steinbeck's view on the world is partly influenced by American Transcendentalism. The use of interchapter parallels serves as a pointer to the relationship between natural environments and the inner, the moral and the spiritual conditions of humanity on earth to make it clear that "nature is the symbol of spirit"<sup>2</sup>. The description of the nature phenomena and natural objects indicates that whenever there is perversion in the spirit of man, there must be perversion in nature outside him. Natural calamities are only the result of cumulative perverted human actions, to some extent, which reflects the transcendental ideas on the world in his writing.

It is left to critics, like Frederick I. Carpenter, Chester E. Eisinger, Joseph Fontenrose, Warren French, and Peter Lisca, to examine *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Frederick L. Carpenter observes that "For the first time in history, *The Grapes of Wrath* brings together and makes real three skeins of American thought. It begins with the transcendental Oversoul, Emerson's faith in the common man and his Protestant self-reliance. To this it joins Whitman's religion of the love of all men and his mass democracy. And it combines these mystical and poetic ideas with the realistic philosophy of pragmatism and its emphasis on effective action".<sup>3</sup>

In the eighteenth century it was generally held that the world was made up of matter neglecting of spiritual welfare. In 1836, a new voice "The Universe is composed of Nature and the Soul," was heard for the first time in the New World and it also said "Spirit is present everywhere," with a little book entitled *Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson coming out which made a tremendous impact on the intellectual life of America. A whole new way of thinking began to exert its influence on the consciousness of man. *Nature's* voice pushed American Romanticism into a new phase, the phase of New England Transcendentalism, the summit of American Romanticism.<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to transcendentalism, Emerson is one of the important representatives who can not be ignored. He was the descendant of a long line of New England clergymen. When he was in Harvard, he underwent a spiritual "odyssey." The liberal atmosphere of the college made him reconsider his Calvinist belief with which he was brought up. Then he embraced the Christianity of Unitarianism. Its principles include the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and continual progress of mankind. It was an obvious improvement on Calvinism which never accepted the prospect of man's perfectibility. But not for long, he found the rationality of Unitarianism intolerable. He went to Europe, and met and made friends with Coleridge, Carlyle, and Wordsworth, and brought back with him the influence of European Romanticism. With people of like minds such as Thoreau, Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller, he formed an informal Transcendentalists' club. They were not quite happy about the materialistic-oriented



life of their time, and met to discuss matters of interest to the life of the nation as a whole. They published their journal, *The Dial*, expressing their views, and made their voice heard. Most of them are teachers or clergymen, radicals reacting against the faith of Boston businessmen and the cold, rigid rationalism of Unitarianism. The word, "Transcendental," was not native to America; it was a Kantian term denoting, as Emerson put it, "Whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought."<sup>5</sup>

Actually, New England Transcendentalism was the product to a combination of foreign influences and native American Puritan tradition. It should also be noted that Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau were indebted to Oriental mysticism and to the doctrine and philosophy of the Chinese Confucius and Mencius. Some Transcendentalist writers like Bronson Alcott, were interested in Hindu or Buddhist works. On the whole, the Transcendentalist movement, both early and late, was a product of Unitarianism, Puritanism, and other currents of Western thought and also of contact with the world religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism.

Another renowned New England Transcendentalist was Henry David Thoreau, and his masterpiece, *Walden*, is a great Transcendentalist work. He had built a cabin on a piece of Emerson's property on Walden Pond, where he lived solitarily for two years. He saw nature as a genuine restorative, healthy influence on man's spiritual well-being, and regarded it as a symbol of spirit. It was his firm belief that "natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings." Indeed, *Walden* is a faithful record of his reflections when he was in solitary communion with nature and in this book he also placed importance to self-culture and human perfectibility. He couldn't understand why his fellowmen would like to take such an enormous amount of interest on the developments of the outside world like the railroad, the telegraph and the French Revolution, and yet did not want to spend so little as a single moment on the improvement of his own person. He thought modern civilized life has dehumanized man and placed him in a spiritual quandary: by trying to amass material possessions, man is not really living; he

digging his own grave. He tried to wake his fellows up. He went to the woods not to gratify his whims as was alleged, but to experiment with a new way of life for himself and for his fellowmen. And he felt he came out of it a better man, reborn and reinvigorated. Thus regeneration became a major thematic concern of *Walden*. The book exhibited Thoreau's calm trust in the future and his ardent belief in a new generation of men and it concluded on a clear note of optimism and hope: "The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us," and "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." He believed the possible prospect of a beautiful and winged life for man.<sup>6</sup>

New England Transcendentalism was an important movement in philosophy and literature that flourished during the early to middle years of the nineteenth century (about 1836-1860). It inspired a whole new generation of famous authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and Dickinson.

The major-features of New England Transcendentalism can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the Transcendentalists placed emphasis on spirit, or the Oversoul, as the most important thing in the universe. The Oversoul was an all-pervading power for goodness, omnipresent and omnipotent, from which all things came and of which all were a part. It existed in nature and man alike and constituted the chief element of the universe. They believed that the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul and the nature is the garment of God. They also advocated a direct intuition of a spiritual and immanent God in nature. Emerson's doctrine of the Oversoul is graphically illustrated in such famous statements: "Each mind lives in the Grand mind," "There is one mind common to all individual mind," and "Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life." In his opinion, man is made in the image of God and the spiritual and immanent God is operative in the soul of man, and that man is divine. In transcendentalists' opinion, if the individual soul was communed with the Oversoul, it was divine. It represented a new way of looking at the world. Secondly, the Transcendentalists stressed the importance of the individual. To them the

individual was the most important element of society. The regeneration of society could only come about through the regeneration of the individual, his perfection, his self-culture and self-improvement. The Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau were telling people to depend upon themselves for spiritual perfection. They were optimistic about human perfectibility. They believed the regeneration of the individual leads to the regeneration of society. Emerson's famous remark, "I ask for the individuals, not the nation."<sup>7</sup> They were also optimistic for the future and felt that all misery and suffering is superficial. It was a reaction against the Calvinist concept that man is totally depraved, he is sinful; and perseveres in sinhood, and can not hope to be saved except through the grace of God. It was also a reaction against the process of dehumanization which came in the wake of developing capitalism. To Transcendentalists, the industrialization of New England was turning men into nonhumans. People were losing their individuality and were becoming uniform. The Transcendentalists saw the process in progress and, by trying to reassert the importance of the individual, emphasized the significance of men regaining their lost personality. Thirdly, the Transcendentalists offered a fresh perception of nature as symbolic of the Spirit or God. Nature was, to them, not purely matter. It was alive, filled with God's overwhelming presence and spirit. It was the garment of the Oversoul. Therefore it could exercise a healthy and restorative influence on the human mind. What the Transcendentalists seemed to be saying was, "Go back to nature, sink yourself back into its influence and you'll become spiritually whole again." The natural implication of all this was, of course the things in nature tended to become symbolic, and the physical world was a symbol of the spiritual. This in turn added to the tradition of literary symbolism in American literature.<sup>8</sup>

In their eyes, the physical world is alive and evolutionary. Nature is emblematic of God. It mediates between man and God. Nature is the vehicle of the thought of God and "Nature is the symbol of spirit." A flowing river indicates the ceaseless motion of the universe. The seasons correspond to the life span of man. The ant, the

little drudge, with a small body and a mighty heart, is the sublime image of man himself.<sup>9</sup>

New England Transcendentalism is important to American literature. Steinbeck once said that there are five layers in the novel of *The Grapes of Wrath*. One layer may be American Transcendentalism, which can be seen not only in the implication of description of the nature phenomena and natural objects but also in creating the main characters of Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Ma and Rose of Sharon.

This essay makes a tentative analysis of the transcendental tendency in *The Grapes of Wrath* from three angles:

- 1) spirit pervading in the Universe,
- 2) nature symbolizing the spirit,
- 3) spiritual perfection of individual.

And in Conclusion a further and more generalized comment will be made about the transcendental influence on the author and the novel as well.

## **Chapter I Spirit Pervading in the Universe**

Transcendentalism brings new way of thinking to exert its influence on the consciousness of man. In the eighteenth century it was generally held that the world was made up of matter. Transcendentalism believes that the universe is composed of nature and spirit — Oversoul. To the Transcendentalists, the Oversoul is the divine spirit that is present in each man and in all of nature. Simply described, the Oversoul is a kind of cosmic unity between man, God, and nature. It is an all-pervading, omniscient, supreme mind. The presence of the divine spirit in both nature and the human soul makes a direct understanding of God and an access to the natural world avenues to self-understanding. Self-understanding leads to the perception of higher truth. So man could have ideas intuitively not through the five senses or the powers of reasoning; but are either the result of direct revelation from God, his immediate inspiration, or his immanent presence in the spiritual world. And the individual soul is a part of the Oversoul, when the individual soul is communed with the Oversoul, therefore, it is divine.

### **A. Intuition from Spiritual God**

Transcendentalists hold that intuition is a more certain way of knowing than reason and that the mind could intuitively perceive the existence of the Oversoul and of certain absolutes. Having this certain knowledge, a man should trust himself to decide what is right and to act accordingly.

Transcendentalism stresses intuitive understanding of God without the help of the church, and advocates independence of the mind, believing that people could learn things both from the outside world by means of the five senses and from the

inner world by intuition. But the things they learned from within are truer than the things they learn from without, and transcended them. It holds that everyone has access to a source of knowledge that transcended the everyday experiences of sensation and reflection. Intuition was inner light within.

In *the Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's transcendental ideas have clearly done much to determine the characters of the fiction which he writes. The transcendentalists' opinion on intuition from God is represented respectively in the novel by Jim Casy, Tom Joad and even Ma.

Jim Casy, one of the most important protagonists in the novel, prior to our meeting with him, he has spent his life embattled with existing religion. In chapter Four, when Tom first meets Casy, Casy is just coming from the mountains, where he has been thinking and where he gets the revelation intuitively. Dissatisfied with conventional religious truth because it runs counter to his own impulses, he seeks to find God in his own spirit rather than in Bible or church. He lives a solitary life and he communicates with God. He gets his new ideas and he stops to work as a preacher but he has never given up preaching and has worked himself into a kind of Christ-figure by enlarging his consciousness. He gets wisdom from the spiritual God. He tells Tom Joad: " 'Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of' Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a sudden — I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it,"<sup>10</sup> which announces men may come to know truth by an intuitive reaching out and his intuition of truth has been obtained suddenly when one is touching the universe quietly with his soul. This is a moment of "conversion" when one feels completely merged with the outside world, when one has completely sunk into nature and become one with it, and when the soul has gone beyond the physical limits of the body to share the omniscience of the Oversoul. One may touch the spirit pervading everywhere, not only in the soul of man, but behind nature, throughout nature.

And he feels he came out of it a better man, reborn and reinvigorated. Jim Casy has experienced confusion before that moment and says: "I got the call to lead the people, an' no place to lead 'em." (GW, p.26) So he has gone into the desert to be close to God for truth, just like Casy himself put it: "Here's me, been a-goin' into the Wilderness like Jesus to try find out somepin." (GW, p.478)

He also says that: "There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy." (GW, p.99)

Casy has discovered new idea within himself and learned something from the inner world by intuition without the help of the church, when he is alone and near to the spiritual God — in mountains and later in prison, for Jim, the time in jail has been like Christ's days in the wilderness, he has finally worked out things in his mind. He realizes the strength of union, then he organizes a strike as a leader.

Another point is Tom, when he hides himself in the cave after he has killed the deputy, he also gets his knowledge in solitary life close to the universe. When Tom goes forth from the solitary ravine he is emerging from his own Biblical "wilderness". He makes a deep thought there. Finally, he understands what Jim Casy told him "big soul" theory that one is only a part of the "big soul" and one should go to the group for divinity. It is another hint that his knowledge has been "intuitive," almost "divine revelation." Steinbeck takes these situations and examples to illustrate his faith in intuition of truth from God and his emphasis on spirit which is in the universe and pervades everywhere, and only if you sink yourself in the nature you can get it.

Steinbeck is showing that within the nature of man there was something which "transcended" human experience — an intuition and personal revelation. Man's relationship to God is a personal matter and is to be established by the individual himself rather than through the church. God, or nature which is different from or superior to the life we lead and know. Trust one's self is really to trust the "voice of God" speaking intuitively within us.

Besides, intuition of love is another theme Steinbeck intends to convey in *the*

*Grapes of Wrath*. During the long trek to California, Casy accompanies the Joads because he wants to be with people and help them, although he does not know how he can act usefully on their behalf. The strong love for people is based on his intuition, not because he used to be a Christian preacher and not because he follows the doctrine of Christ. He tells Tom:

“I says: ‘What’s this call, this sperit?’ An’ I says: ‘It’s love. I love people so much I’m fit to bust, sometimes’. An’ I says: ‘Don’t you love Jesus?’ Well, I thought an’ thought, an’ finally I says: ‘No, I don’t know nobody name’ Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people.”<sup>(GW, p27)</sup>

And Casy’s strong love for people embodies in his commitment to help the Joads when he gives himself up to the Deputies at the Hooverville in order to protect Tom from being arrested. Otherwise it will be a disaster for the latter to go prison because of having broken the parole. Thus Casy goes to jail. In Chapter Twenty-six, his martyr’s death is for the starving people and for all humanity to live a better life. He says to the two policemen “You fellas don’t know what you’re doin’. You’re helpin’ to starve kids.”<sup>(GW, p 408)</sup> His death echoes with his former remarks “I love people so much”.

Ma too shows her intuition of love. Her intuitive love can be felt in different group of people — love to her own family members, to her neighbors along the way to west, even to people unknown and starving man. She mothers Grandma and Grandpa, chasing Grandpa down to button his pants as if he were a little boy, seeing to Grandma’s needs. She cares for and instructs her pregnant daughter and protects her son. Her actions are out of her intuitive love for her family. She feeds the starving children who gather around her kettle. Though there is not enough to feed her family adequately, she ladles small portions so as to leave some for the children. In every situation in the novel, Ma is ready to share whatever she has with those in need.



When she lies all night with Grandma's dead body in her arms until the group gets across the state border and the California desert for the good of the greater number, Casy assesses Ma's deed "there's a woman so great with love"(GW, p.234) Steinbeck makes it clear that Ma's love to all people is from the inner world by intuition.

In the final scene, from the over flooded land she leads Rose of Sharon to a barn, where she finds a starving old man lying. It is the last scene of the novel depicting the intuitive love of Ma. On finding the starving old man, Ma's eyes pass Rose of Sharon's eyes and then come back to them. Ma is basically the mother, but she has no milk in her breasts to feed others. As a penniless woman she has no means to provide milk to the dying man. The dying man is an old man, but he is the symbol of humanity in need of milk, the life-giving food. So she turns to Sharon who has the milk. Rose of Sharon can hardly think of feeding the old man but for Ma's inspiration. Throughout the novel Ma emerges as a symbol of love, as a person who instinctively practices brotherly love. She is a person of insight and intuition, because her actions are based on this love principle intuitively rather than consciously. What Ma has done is based on her own independent mind, from her strong determination to California at the very beginning to her eventual control over the family on the way to the west to save the starving man at the end of the novel. Ma trusts herself to decide what is right and what should act by her intuition, which is advocated by transcendentalism.

In short, Casy's rebellion against the old religion, his continual soul searching in the wilderness, his announcement of the new religion and his intuitive love for people whom he has led is the reflection of Steinbeck's philosophy on the relationship between the soul of individual and the soul of the universe. As a part of the Oversoul, the spirit, the wisdom and the emotions of an individual can all come out of the universe freely and intuitively. So man should seek truth directly by himself and not through imitation of others. And Casy's new ideas got in the mountains and revelation got in the prison ,even Tom's consciousness in the cave reflect the transcendental philosophy — intuition is the inner light.

## **B. Individual Divinity with Oversoul**

One major element of Emerson's philosophy is his firm belief in the transcendence of the "Oversoul." In his opinion, man is made in the image of God and is just a little less than Him. Therefore, the individual soul is a part of the Oversoul. Emerson's doctrine of the Oversoul is illustrated in such famous statements: "Each mind lives in the Grand mind," "There is one mind common to all individual mind," and "Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life." And he strongly believes in the divinity and infinity of man as an individual, so man can totally rely on himself.<sup>11</sup>

The transcendental idea of individual divinity with the Oversoul is represented in the novel by protagonist Jim Casy as a leader for the oppressed masses, and as a sacrificial figure whose death would offer man a new beginning and a second chance. In Chapter four when we meet with him for the first time and in the first part of Casy's statement in *The Grapes of Wrath*, he expresses "Maybe all man got one big soul..." and "...everybody's a part of", actually has a rather fancy name in the history of American philosophical thought: Transcendental Oversoul. Jim Casy is divine and he is the leader and prophet in the novel not only for what he says but also for what he does.

Casy always shows his idea of unity during the long trek to California. Casy accompanies the Joads because he wants to be with people and help them, although he does not know how he can act usefully on their behalf. In Chapter Twenty, in order to protect Tom from being arrested, he takes the responsibility for the fight and is taken to the Depuies at the Hooverville. Later, he explains to Tom Joad that in prison he learns that men must unite and work together in order to promote social change. Casy acknowledges that by leading the strike he must accept the possible sacrifice of his own life and he believes in the naturalness of this.

The individual must change from an isolated self to an involved member of the

community. In the novel all the surviving Joads make this change, a point which is best illustrated by Tom. At the beginning of the novel, Tom is a loner who begins the novel looking out only for number one, as his solitary initial appearance and his aggressive manipulation of the witless truck driver indicate. He has no direction in his life. Yet at the end of the novel, Tom has radically changed and he has found that he cannot continue to wander; to survive in this new land, he needs some unifying aim.

Tom's transformation is complete in the parting scene between Ma and him when announcing his intention of taking up Casy's work and trying to induce "our people... to work together for our own thing". He tells Ma about Casy's ideas and he also expresses what he thinks in his mind:

"Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' - was whole....I know now a fella ain't no good alone." (GW, p524)

He also quotes what Casy had taught him "Two are better than one" and it reinforces Tom's belief in the strength which men can achieve through unity: "a three-fold cord is not quickly broken." When Ma expresses her fears that he will be killed and vanished from his parents' sight forever, he tells the troubled Ma:

"Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one — an' then... Then it don't matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where — wherever you look. Wherever they's a fighting so hungry people can eat, I'll be there...An, when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why I'll be there". (GW, p385)

Tom's speech is full expression that when you are unified with others, you are

strengthened and divine. His remark— “I’ll be there” refers to the spirit, or the soul, which is becoming the part of the Oversoul which is pervading in the universe. When he is the part of the universe Oversoul presenting everywhere, individual divinity is realized and it is getting stronger and stronger. He fulfills his development from an individualistic and quick to a dedicated leader. Although he is still an outlaw of society at the end of the novel, yet his identity has been completely changed, that is, he has become another leader after Jim Casy whose responsibility is to fight for the social amelioration and a better way of life for his own people.

“I’ll be ever’where-whenever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’— I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build— why, I’ll be there. See? God, I’m talkin’ like Casy. Comes of thinkin’ about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes” (p444)

Transcendental philosophy can clearly be seen in Tom’s growth and his remarks. It fully explains Steinbeck’s view of the cosmos: Steinbeck’s belief that all living things are related into a Whole. Steinbeck does have a very definite view of the individual man in relation to the unified cosmos, and he also has a somewhat systematic social philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Ma is another example to show the relationship between the individual soul and the Oversoul. At first she only thinks of her own family, but at the end she realizes the strength of the unity. It is not only Tom but also Ma Joad who learns Casy’s lesson after Tom has departed. Now she realizes the imperishability of the people and when the individual is connected to the whole, the “big soul”, man is divine. She also starts growing beyond her limited sense of love for the family.

Steinbeck may be placed into a continuing skein of American thought from Emerson to Whitman to William James. These previous American thinkers may have influenced Steinbeck's developing social thought. Although there is no concrete evidence that Steinbeck had read any of their books, their ideas concerning the individual and the community are quite analogous. Possibly Steinbeck may have come in contact with their ideas and writings because their ideas had influenced American and American literature prior to the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which deals directly with man's sense of the love and dignity and the relationship of the individual to the whole.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that he traces three strands of 19<sup>th</sup> century American philosophy in Steinbeck's writings, one of them is American Transcendentalism, in its concept of the "Oversoul" and in its faith in the common man and in self-reliance.

There are more examples to show Steinbeck takes the transcendental tendency in writing *the Grapes of Wrath*. In Chapter Thirteen, Grandpa dies of a stroke before leaving Oklahoma. Then, in Chapter Eighteen the family loses its eldest son, Noah, who gives up the western journey with the family and finds a private peace beside the enticing waters of the Colorado River. Also in the same chapter, Grandma dies just before the family reaches the Promised Land of California. In the following narrative chapters of the family's life in California, the reduction continues: Connie deserts his pregnant wife and leaves the family for his personal dream; Tom is forced to leave the family but to serve the larger, universal family of the group. In the novel's closing tableau, the Joads have been reduced by half. As the Joads are reduced as a family, they become increasingly a part of the larger whole as they begin to identify with the mass of the migrants. The first step in this gradual change is the family's inclusion of Casy in the council and on the journey. The final steps are Tom's dedication of his life to all men and Rose of Sharon's breast-feeding of the starving stranger. Between these two ends Steinbeck makes it clear that the Joads have become part of something much larger than themselves. In Chapter Thirteen the family takes in the Wilsons, an

isolated pair of evicted sharecroppers more vulnerable to life-eroding wear of the road. It is Ma who solidifies the alliance between the Joads and the Wilsons: "You won't be no burden. Each'll help each, an' we'll all git to California"<sup>(GW, p.158)</sup> In Chapter Sixteen, Steinbeck writes: "Joads and Wilsons crawled westward as a unit..."<sup>(GW, p.173)</sup> Near the novel's end, stranded by rising flood waters in a boxcar camp, the remaining Joads merge with another family, the Wainwrights, whose daughter Al plans to marry. As the novel approaches its final scene Ma silently encourages her daughter to nurse the dying man, this commitment to mankind as a whole is understood. The isolated individual or the isolated family is no longer sufficient; they must be committed to all men and to the larger whole.

At the beginning of the novel, the Joads as a unit are attuned to solving the problems of their lives without outside aid. They raise and prepare their own food, they make their own clothes, and they create and maintain their own special form of transportation. But at the end of the novel, they transform from "self" to "group", the transformation of the Joad family from a self-contained, self-sustaining unit to a conscious part of a group, a whole larger than its parts. Steinbeck has developed ideas about the divinity of the unity and makes readers see the hope in the future when communed with the "big soul".

Steinbeck makes efforts to create characters and situations in which man demonstrates the divinity when communed with a "big soul", not only by the process Tom gets the idea first then he practices it, but also by the transcendence of a family as unity to a whole group.

## **Chapter II Nature Symbolizing the Spirit**

Transcendentalism maintains that what we call Nature, the external world, has no real existence—is only phenomenal and the higher use of the material world is to furnish man types or pictures to express the thoughts of the mind. Nature is the vehicle of thought. The central doctrine of their philosophy is that God himself does not speak directly, but communicates with man by hints, omens, inference, and resemblances in objects lying all around man. Natural objects and phenomena are parts of the universe, and all things in Nature, such as the mountain, the river, the seasons, wood, iron, stone, and so on, have a mysterious relation to man's thoughts and man's life. Every object is an image. The world is like an immense picture-book symbolizing spirit of God and man. To the Transcendentalists, Nature is the gigantic shadow of God cast on the senses. Nature is a means by which God reveals his plan to man. Transcendentalism believes that everything in the universe is viewed as an expression of the divine spirit, and natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express human thoughts and feelings.

### **A. Natural Objects as Spiritual Symbols**

Transcendentalism believes that natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Behind physical objects is a universal soul. It took nature as symbolic of spirit of God. All things in nature are symbols of the spiritual, of God's presence. Nature is the garment of the over-soul, symbolic and moral bound. In transcendentalists' eyes, a flowing river indicates the ceaseless motion of the universe. The ant, the little drudge, with a small body and a mighty heart, is the sublime image of man himself. Transcendentalism is also against the direction that a mechanized, capitalist America was taking, against the popular tendency to get ahead in world affairs to the neglect of

spiritual welfare. Steinbeck's view on nature in the novel is similar to that of transcendentalists'. He gives many descriptions of natural objects to imply the spirit of nature and man. Tractor, turtle, dust and flood are all meaningful and full of spiritual in his eyes.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a work of fiction, in which Steinbeck uses various natural objects as symbols to reinforce the theme of his disapproval of materialistic-oriented life of his time. According to transcendentalism, the industrialization of New England was turning men into nonhumans. Steinbeck illustrates his agreement on the idea by taking some objects as symbols to reveal the dehumanization which came in the development of capitalism. Take the tractors for example. The tractors symbolize both the process of dehumanization and the process of unnatural lust for wealth and neglect of the element of love of the land. The tenants blamed the tractors, saying that a tractor couldn't have a heart for the land and the purely mechanical tractors "cutting the earth with blades". Steinbeck points out that it is, in fact, not an act of ploughing but an act of raping the earth, "raping methodically, raping without passion". And "the land bore under iron gradually died: for it was not love or hatred, it has no prayers or cursed" (GW, p 34-35). Steinbeck regards the tractor as one of the monsters in Chapter Five which "don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat." Such creatures "breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. It is the destructive force in the physical world to destroy the moral of human controlled by the cruel banks and the purely mechanical tractors "cutting the earth with blades" (GW, p35). Moreover, the coming of the tractor is symbol of cold-hearted relationship among people in capital society that "He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth ..." (p36). The tractor, the mechanical way of life, is the creation of man himself. It is the product of his indomitable will to produce plenty for the self alone — the society is a secondary factor.

Then a further look can be taken at the inner decay and dehumanization of some



characters in the novel. The cruel bankers and companies drive the tenants away from their land and destroy the houses of tenants without mercy in order to have more profits. The owner of the petrol station reacts truculently to the Joads because he fears that they may not buy anything but when they do he becomes friendly. The relationship between each other becomes tense for making profits only. The owner of the car-sales yard displays aggression and unpleasantness in his references to other people as “sons of bitches”, “old bastard” and “dumb bunny”, but the man whom he insultingly calls a “piker” later becomes a “gentleman” when he agrees to buy a car. The salesman talks decently to those who buy a car but someone who refuses a “deal” is called a “bum”. The salesman acts hypocritically and egocentrically and shows no concern whatsoever for the people to whom he sells cars. He lacks any moral principles, and he tells his assistant to “Take out that yard battery before you make delivery. Put in that dumb cell. Christ, what they want for six bits?” (GW, p.69). The attempt to justify this action by the inference that “six bits” is very cheap for a battery shows the perversity of his thinking. The salesman knows that his present opportunity “ain’t gonna last” and so he tries to acquire the maximum profit in the time available to him. Avarice motivates him. The salesman skillfully manipulates his clients. When a farmer proposes to trade two mules in part exchange for a car the salesman exploits the farmer’s ignorance of “business” by pretending that the mules are worthless. The insincerity of the one man opposes the sincerity of the other, and because the salesman is shrewd and experienced in these situations he can cheat the inexperienced farmers. Those who return to the salesman when they discover that they have been cheated receive curt treatment: “Sure, we sold it. Guarantee? We guaranteed it to be an automobile. We didn’t guarantee to wet-nurse it” (GW, p.72). The salesman does not give written guarantees and misleads the buyers with worthless verbal guarantees. The migrants in California experience a similar problem with the labor contractors who make verbal promises about the wages they pay but who refuse to write out a contract. When the migrants arrive for work they usually find that the wages offered

are less than they had expected. That reinforces the portrait of the salesman's ruthless behavior and reveals the salesman's inhuman avarice. Human nature is mirrored in the outer nature in exact proportion to its dominant condition. It can be firmly believed that the tractors symbolize the human spirit of decay in the story.

In addition, the prowling cat stands for the union of hunger and violence as an agent of corruption in the wasteland. The death of the stray dog under the truck on the road reflects violence and destructive forces of nature, which indicates the road is no better than the land the Joads travel from. Transcendentalism held that every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Still-born child of Rose of Sharon is also predicted in the dog's death. The spiritually starved Rose of Sharon and selfish Connie could produce nothing living and hence the child is still-born. There are many other symbols and symbolic scenes in the novel. They all point to the central thematic structure of the novel. In this novel, Steinbeck grows to the position of a master transmuting the local and the contemporary into the universal and the timeless, national into the cosmic, the social into the humanistic dimensions. He transcends the traditional and the conventional religious and social frameworks and ideologies. The novel is not the tale of a single family but the spiritual odyssey of humanity from the lowest moral state to an elevated state of universal love and a mystic realization of human bondage and spiritual unity. He is very critical of modern civilization which has dehumanized man and placed him in a spiritual quandary.

Moreover, another significant natural image is turtle. Steinbeck devotes a total chapter to describe a turtle crossing the highway in Chapter Three, so it is necessary to look for its significance.

The turtle "crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging its high-domed shell over the grass...", "climb the embankment...As the embankment grew steeper and steeper, the more frantic were the efforts of the land turtle."<sup>(GW, p20)</sup> He overcomes the obstacle of a roadside and avoids being killed by the drivers deliberately or accidentally. The truck that hits it, however, only flips the turtle further in the

direction it was already moving. Once the turtle has righted itself again, it continues indomitably on its way.

The turtle carries its home as it travels. On its way of crossing the road, it must hazard life and face the hostile world of machinery. And finally, the turtle continues its pursuit of journey regardless of the obstacles and dangers. Thus the vivid description of the turtle's climbing up the embankment stresses not only the immense physical effort but also the tremendous willpower which it exerts.

Here the indomitable, indestructible and unconquerable spirit of the turtle that the author describes merges into an organic whole with the migrants who will appear in the later narrative chapters. Therefore, the turtle is symbolizing the spirit of persistence of the migrants — persistence against heavy odds. In this way, the turtle functions as vehicle of migrants' thought before they appear in the novel. Its actions parallel the spirit of stoicism the migrants express to overcome the obstacles on their way west. And it also symbolizes the migrants' struggle to establish a new life in California.

The turtle, of course, stands for a spirit, for survival, for the mysterious and instinctive life force which prompts him to begin over again each time, despite setbacks, his laborious progress and which likewise will impel the Joads onward to California. The turtle crushes a red ant which gets in the way of his armored shell, and survives the truck driver's attempt to crush him. Similarly, the Joads endure and overcome the obstacles on their journey to California. They are kicked around by the policemen. They have got too lowest salary to support their life and bad treatment from the land owners. They have to face death all the time.

Steinbeck is conveying to the readers transcendental philosophy by which natural objects are spirit symbols and one can learn something valuable from these natural objects. There is more significance in the image of the turtle. When he has regained his upright position on the other side of the road, and at the end of the novel, although the Joads lose all property, they gain in their spirit and morality, and they are

conscious and regain their position in society. They survive and improve themselves as well. At this point, the turtle symbolizes the spirit of stoicism that one can endure the slow march of humanity and the existence of life at the lowest stratum of consciousness. The sufferings and humiliations the Joads experienced are overwhelming, but these people are never entirely overwhelmed. It is the will to live and faith in life.

## **B. Natural Phenomena Reflecting Human Spirit**

Transcendentalism stresses unity of humanity and nature. It believes that nature is alive, filled with God's overwhelming presence. Nature is God's enlightenment towards human beings. If human becomes immoral and corrupt, natural calamity will occur. Therefore nature's beauty is the beauty of human mind and natural phenomena reflects the human spirit. Nature not only shows humanity by its own materiality but teaches human morality. People should come close to nature for instructions. The two are joined together.

Anyone who has read the novel carefully enough can see such transcendental philosophy in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the author also offers enlightenment by showing us the variety of natural changes. Transcendental view on the relationship between nature and human can be shown clearly in description of some natural phenomena.

The novel begins with drought in the first sentence "To the red country and part of the grey country of Oklahoma the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth."<sup>(GW, p7)</sup> John Steinbeck makes a further vivid description of the natural environment — "The surface of the earth crusted, and thin hard crust ...the sky became pale, so the earth became pale..."<sup>(GW, p7)</sup> Then the dust formed, "Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air; a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as

his waist, and a wagon lifted the dust as high the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it.”<sup>(GW, p7)</sup> Then the wind grew stronger and brought the dust into the darkening sky. The word “dust” is repeated twenty-seven times in Chapter One, and the dust is all-pervading, which establishes a situation and an atmosphere, from which will emerge the people and the happenings in the following of the novel.

Transcendentalists believe that every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. And all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols. Steinbeck seems to depict such picture telling the mind of his characters before they emerge in the story. What first encounters in this chapter, or in the whole novel is not with any characters, but with nature or environment: the devastation of the drought to the land is described in detail. The sky, the sun, the wind and the dust seem as much like actors in some silent drama as the huddled people who lie and wait for the dust to settle in their houses. The epic, even anguished description of the physical state of things and the implied mental state makes the reader aware of pending crises, of the whole world or way of life hanging in the balance. Under the oppressive atmosphere, the rather generalized “people” appear in the concluding passage of this chapter. The people come out of their houses tense and watchful. “And the women come out the houses to stand beside their men — to feel whether this time the men could break, The women studied the men’s faces secretly...and the children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break...Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole”<sup>(GW, p.9)</sup> The rather generalized “men” “women” and “children” who stand bewildered in the dust. It suggests significantly here that the nature is the vehicle of man’s spirit —confusion, fear, and bewilderment, and the miserable fate of people can be predicted by the nature.

The description of dust reinforces one of the themes: deteriorating morale which will at length split up the family unit, and the primary forces that the migrants are to

struggle with.

Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, dying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men – to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly<sup>(GW. p9)</sup>

And "The men sat in the doorways of their houses; their hands were busy with sticks and little rocks. The men sat still- thinking- figuring."<sup>(GW. p10)</sup>

The author uses "the ruined corn, dying fast" as if he is telling the subsequent destructive forces to the characters in the novel, and "a little green showing through the film of dust" as if he is predicting the hope although sufferings have to be faced. "The men were silent", for they are at a loss what to do, and they are thinking and figuring.

After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked: what'll we do?<sup>(GW. p10)</sup>

Then "man lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant"<sup>(GW. p9)</sup>, from such introduction, the strength is regained and the goal of life may be identified. It indicates that in the following chapter the remained members in the Joads are conscious and they are all aware of their position in the society and the way in front of them. They know what they should do after experiencing setbacks.

To Emerson's Transcendental eyes, the physical world was alive and evolutionary and he said "Nature is the vehicle of thought," and "particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts." Thus the natural world is one of

multiple significances, and everything bears a second sense and an ulterior sense. Therefore, it is easy to understand that the purpose of Steinbeck's detailed description of the drought and dust is to make the readers realize that it is the language telling inner absence of morality of the characters in the novel and giving revelation to people, and they should think about their future carefully and seriously. The detailed and accurate description of the dust-bowl is transmitting the moral barrenness and spiritual sterility of the inner landscape.

Nature is joined with human spirit. Take the Joads for example, at the beginning of the story Tom has just come out of the prison for killing a person showing his tough and violent nature. Rose of Sharon smiles with self-satisfaction and complacency. Both she and Connie seem to be self-centered and preoccupied with themselves: "The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the centre of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the centre of it with Connie making a small orbit about her. Everything they said was a kind of secret" (GW. p.137) She cares little for other people. Grandpa is not only vicious, but also impatient like a frantic child. Grandma is "as mean as her husband," "and as savage as anything Grandpa could offer" (GW. p.58) Uncle John wallows in the self-pity brought on by the death of his wife. Tom's brother, Al is concerned chiefly with his own concupiscence. Pa Joad is self-centered and weak-willed. Even Ma just thinks about her own family and has a large farm. They are all empty and barrenness in spirit. So they have to go west to pursue their spirit. This migration or journey forms a central part of the novel's structure and involves a process of learning for characters like Tom, Ma, and Rose of Sharon. They confront new experiences and adapt their beliefs. When the story comes to end, each comes to acknowledge a responsibility to all people rather than simply to themselves or their own family.

Steinbeck warns people that nature is filled with God's overwhelming presence. Nature is God's enlightenment towards human beings. If human becomes immoral and corrupt, natural calamity will appear.

The first section of the novel ends with Chapter Ten, which deals with the drought in Oklahoma: "the houses were left vacant on the land, and the land was vacant because of this". It makes Oklahoma a deserted land. The author uses the word "vacant" seemingly to tell people that God may be wrathful for their deteriorating morale in the form of drought. Natural phenomena are unified with the spirit of humanity. Nature is the language to express the enlightenment from God. God is telling the people that they are in the edge of danger for their empty in spirit and moral barrenness.

Immorality can also be seen everywhere, when the Joads get to California. The Joads are called "Okies", are abused and looked down upon. The fertile lands all around are owned and managed by impersonal companies. Laborers are hired at daily wages which does not provide even a day's food and they are beaten and ill-treated if they show even the slightest sign of protest. In spite of the fact that the year is heavy with produce, it fails to bring joy and happiness to the workers. The land is filled with hungry people, on the other hand the fruits rot on the tree and the vine; oranges and corn and potatoes are dumped and destroyed. "the smell of rot" fills the country. This happens because there is no profit to be had from the harvest. What matters most for the owners is the profit and not the richness of the harvest. No one is concerned about these physically hungry laborers and their starving families. John Steinbeck says in the novel:

The fields were fruitful and starving men moved on the road. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic and the pustules of pellagra swelled on their sides. The great companies did not know that the line between hunger and anger is a thin line ... On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. (GW. p260-261)

The sufferings of the people could not be understood by the rich landowners.



God's enlightenment to make man aware of their corruption is presented by the description of the corruption of the natural world. From "the smell of rot", the moral corruption can also be felt. The starving people can get nothing from the harvest, because the great companies care for profits only not for the life of other people. They lack sympathy and mercy and they have no love in their heart.

In transcendentalists' eye, nature has a healthy and restorative influence on human mind. The thought of God can be sensed in nature and people can regenerate themselves with nature. Human mind and human morality is associated with nature.

Burn coffee for fuel in the shops. Burn corn to keep warm. It makes hot fire.  
Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out... There is a failure here that topples all our success.  
The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunk, and the ripe fruit. And children dying... because the fruit must rot, must be forced to rot... In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage <sup>(GW. p319-320)</sup>

God's wrath is obvious because there is perversion in the land and perversion in the souls of men. Unless love sweetens the souls and the spiritual light shines there, the grapes are bound to be the grapes of wrath.

Then the rain, water and flood comes for God's wrath in Chapter Twenty-nine of the novel, which is the lesson given by God to make the people restore morality and love so that they can be taken away from tragedy to have a new beginning.

In the final chapter of the novel, Steinbeck arranges the destructive rain, water and flood in significance. The water destroys the nature, the work of man, and even the man himself. Transcendentalism believes "Nature's beauty is the beauty of human mind"<sup>14</sup>. The nature is destroyed, which indicates the immorality in human beings' mind is destroyed at the same time. The rains not only "brought down the trees", but

also “bent the willows deep in the current”. They also “poured over the highways”, “wet the beds and blankets”, “fouled the carburetors”. Finally, the rains begin to destroy man himself:

Then from the tents, from the crowded barns, groups of sodden men went out, their clothes sloping rages, 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 beg for relief, to try to steal, to lie. (GW, p458)

The destruction experienced by man is not only moral, but also physical. The author gives a detailed description — “Then the sickness came, pneumonia, and measles that went to the eyes and to the mastoids.” (GW, p458) -

But at the same time “In the wet hay of leaking barns babies were born” (GW, p459) In spite of these destructive elements, the creative element, the regenerative force, is given birth — “babies were born”. In this way, Steinbeck shifts the tone of the chapter, and that of the whole novel. A flood destroys the selfishness and immorality, but it is followed by a new humanity and a new history.

At the end of the story the Joads have been stripped clean in several senses. They have lost most of their possessions, including the truck which had served for the family since their departure from Oklahoma (a symbol of materialistic-oriented way of life). In the family itself, the weak (Grandpa and Grandma) dies and the irredeemably self-preoccupied (Noah deserts the group, selfish Connie disappears, and Rose of Sharon’s baby — the product of selfishness — dies, and finally Al leaves for marriage) have fallen away, the rest of the family members endure much death and hardship and they are reborn in moral and regenerate themselves by abandoning selfish nature. Steinbeck uses the rain, water and flood in the final chapter to cohere with the first sentence “the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth”. The flood symbolizes the destructive force to the immorality and corruption

coming not gently but forcefully and brings a promise of a new beginning, a new start, a re-creation.

In transcendentalists' eyes, natural calamities and phenomena like drought and flood cannot be taken as a wayward and chaotic manifestation of nature. It is the symbol of spiritual universe. Because there is an inflexible cosmic will — God's spirit that governs the life of all; natural calamities have to be explained in terms of some breach of the universal code of morality. The dust-bowl, thus, represents the deathlike state to which the Joad family has been, spiritually and morally, reduced. Steinbeck mentions "the dust" twenty-seven times in three pages of the first chapter, such a large frequency of "the dust" makes it assume the function of the symbol of the spiritually barren wasteland inside and outside the Joad family. Peter Lisca observes, "The dust...comes to stand not only for the land itself, but also for the basic situation out of which the novel's action develops". (GW, p158) The basic situation is that of spiritual bankruptcy, moral and social perversion and economic depression. The dust symbolizes utter negation of fertility. It also symbolizes physical and spiritual sterility. The Joads' effort to escape this wasteland is only a physical effort, to begin with. They do not understand that the spiritual dimensions of this wasteland are cosmic and omnipresent, and will choose them as their victims unless they grow spiritually to cope with the problem that has set in from within. The outer reality is only symptomatic of their inner decay and this they realize gradually during the course of the novel. Finally, Tom, Ma and Rose of Sharon's rebirth is with the rebirth of nature.

### **Chapter III Spiritual Perfection of Individual**

Emerson declares that God is perfection, and that man is perfectible through his connection to God. Goodness and the reward of goodness are within man, who does not require external structures to ensure his virtue. The world exudes a kind of sympathetic support of man's goodness, because it is in harmony with the laws of the universe.

Transcendentalists foster a belief in man's power to bring about personal improvement and social change in harmony with God's purposes. Man can depend upon himself for spiritual perfection if he cares to make the effort because, in their opinion, the individual soul is communion with the Oversoul.

Transcendentalism emphasizes the significance of the individual and believes that the individual is the most important element in society and that the ideal kind of individual is self-reliant and unselfish. People should depend on themselves for spiritual perfection. They are optimistic about human perfectibility and believed the regeneration of the individual leads to the regeneration of society.

#### **A. Infinity of Self-perfection**

The transcendentalists have an uncompromising concern for individual's moral development rather than for social progress. They value self-culture and human perfectibility and believed that the possibilities for man to develop and improve himself are infinite.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck doesn't describe directly an ideal society in the novel, but a promising future can be imagined by creating some principal characters like Tom, Ma, and Rose of Sharon who have regenerated themselves from

the beginning to the end of novel. Their constant growth illustrates the perfectibility of individual could be realized by self-improvement and self-culture, or by re-education and rebirth.

Casy functions principally as a character in the novel to explain the value of self-improvement and self-culture. At the beginning of the novel, he has already left preaching and has returned from his sojourn in the hills, thinking almost like Jesus went into the wilderness to think His way out of a mess of troubles. Although Casy is already approaching his revelation, it is only through his experiences with the Joads that he is able to complete his vision. So he moves from the purely speculative to the pragmatic, from stasis to action. He rebels against the old religion; he continually search his new ideas in the wilderness; he is more and more aware of the situation and finally he leads the strike and dies for his commitment to aid the other to live a happy life, which are all showing he is regenerating himself and perfecting himself. He makes readers see great potential of an individual needed to set free.

Jim Casy appears in the novel as a character who has passed through many phases of life, occupation, schools of theology and philosophy. To begin with, he is a priest who preaches the gospel of Christ, at the same time he himself leads a free and promiscuous life. He preaches against sin on the one hand and passes through the temptations of sensuality on the other. Disgusted with this split within himself, between theory and practice, he goes to the mountains. In sheer loneliness and silence of the mountains, through a very close self-analysis, he comes to receive a new knowledge. This knowledge rounds him off as a man who returns to the world to be further initiated into the practice of unifying men. He is a man of revolutionary nature, a man who is larger than his compatriots and contemporaries, and, who gains stature by virtue of his free thinking. Jim Casy is always the learner, a man consumed by a desire to see things clearly, to see them on the context of the whole and to understand. One reason for him to join the Joads on their trek to California is that he senses that something big is happening in the country and he wants to observe and understand it.

On the way to California he has realize that starving people have to unify with each other to form a strong group for survival. At the beginning of the novel, Casy is confused where to lead people to go and at the end of novel he knows exactly where he should lead them to go. He transcends himself by self-improvement not only in theory but also in practice.

Ma is also a good example to demonstrate the self-culture on the way to California. She seems to transcend the limitations of home or sexual relationships.

At first, she dreams she should have a happy home and a happy family. On the way to California, she makes efforts to remove her family from the hunger, starvation and perhaps death.

After Tom's departure, the whole responsibility of keeping the family together devolves on Ma. Frustrated with the wretched conditions in California, Ma feels that perhaps the end of their lives is very near. But Ma very emphatically refutes such an idea because she has a firm belief that the human race goes on and does not die though it changes a little from time to time. It shows her optimism and her unshaken belief in a better future. She has knowledge of the eternity of human race intuitively. Casy and Tom to learn the secrets of life but Ma Joad knows them instinctively. Ma even seems to have realized the importance of the unity of people. Migrants are already in despair, there is no work, no crops and heavy rain creates a sieve of veritable deluge. But Ma's resolution and determination to realize her dream does not waver. From the over flooded hand she leads Rose of Sharon to a barn, where she finds a starving old man lying. It is the last scene of the novel depicting the growth of Ma's consciousness and her character to the size of a cosmic vision in which the individual grows into a family, the family into a social section and society into humanity itself. On finding the starving old man, Ma encourages Rose of Sharon to save the man with her milk. The dying man is the symbol of humanity in need of the life-giving food. Her radiant personality throws out the rays of love. Ma contributes to the transformation of the Joad family from a self-contained, self-sustaining unit to

a conscious part of a group, a whole larger than its parts with her consciousness by self-culture.

Tom Joad, and Rose of Sharon who have experienced both re-education and re-birth in the novel, are accepted by all as a central characters in the novel. When Tom Joad emerges in the novel, he is individualistic, quick to wrath, and not always kind to others. He has no purpose and direction in life and hangs between crime and punishment, home and prison with the belief that it is better to live from moment to moment than to seek to understand and thus to plan. In Chapter Four, when Casy explains his beliefs to Tom, the latter shows no real interests in them, because at that time he has just been released from prison and he carries fresh in his mind the disturbing nature of that experience. When he comes in contact with Casy, he is transformed. Jim Casy teaches him: "There ain't no sin, and there ain't no virtue"<sup>(GW, p29)</sup>. "What's this call, this sperit?...I love people so much I'm fit to bust sometimes."<sup>(GW, p23)</sup> When Tom later meets Casy during the strike at the Hooper Ranch and Casy explains the importance of men standing together in order to protect themselves. Tom says little at that time, but he thinks a good deal while he hides out in the cave near the box-cars and it is only after this kind of deep thought that he really becomes one of the most faithful disciples of Jim Casy's.

Tom's extraordinary development during the novel culminates when he decides to act upon Casy's ideas and take over his work. In defending Casy, Tom has killed a man and therefore has to live in boxcar. Musing over Casy's ideas and experiences, he now accepts what he had earlier neither understood nor had even consciously heard. He recalls, Casy went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, and he found he didn't have soul that was his own. He just got o little piece of a great big soul. Casy says a wilderness ain't good, because his little piece of a soul wasn't no good unless it was with the rest, and whole. Then Tom applies that vision to practice by being a leader of migrants. He goes out of his narrow and limited shell of commitment to only self alone and a family unity. He is joining one' soul to that of all

men in social unity, and he decides to pursue a true commitment to aid man to achieve a better life on earth. Tom is transcending into a successful individual who is fully conscious of his identity, his capacities, and his limitations.

Under the education of Jim Casy, he fulfills his development from an individualistic and quick to wrath man to a dedicated leader. Although Tom is still an outlaw of society at the end of the novel, his status is actually changed and he has become another leader whose responsibility is to fight for the social amelioration and a better way of life for his own people. This final rebirth makes Tom more mature and thus he becomes a new prophet after Jim Casy and he takes over Casy's torch into his iron hands.

Whenever one talks about re-educated and matured figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rose of Sharon shall never be forgotten as another important character. When Rose of Sharon first emerges, she is pregnant and she is self-centred to the extent of being egotistical, thinking things all around herself not caring for others. She worries too much about her baby and when her husband leaves her, she is despaired all day long.

All through the story Steinbeck shows Ma instructs Rose of Sharon and teaches her through precept and example nourishing and reinforces her behavior patterns, Rose of Sharon, who prior to the beginning of the story had been "a plump, passionate hoyden," is changed by her pregnancy. As the child grows within her, and she prepares to convert her role from daughter to mother, she becomes "balanced, careful, wise". Her whole thought and action turn inward and she is consumed with her sense of self as potential mother, as a reproductive agent. At the beginning of the trip to California Connie and Rose of Sharon share a universe of their own: "The world had drawn close around them, and they were the center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making small orbit around her." (GW, p. 137) Harshly, they are blasted out of their selfish cycles. Connie behaves badly, abandoning the family and group effort as well as his wife and expected child. Rose



of Sharon, on the other hand, endures many deprivations and deaths and Ma always acts to impart to Rose of Sharon the need for responsibility and sharing.

Rose of Sharon has been educated and improved in a number of ways. For example, after Grandpa's death, Ma encourages Rose of Sharon to take care of Grandma during her final illness. She helps not only with care of the dying but also with nourishing the living. Rose makes her first unselfish gesture of the novel: volunteering to watch the door for the injured Tom. And then, even when she is feeling very weak as a result of both malnutrition and pregnancy, she tries to help with the cooking and cleaning chores. "I oughta help Ma...I tried, but ever' time I stirred about I throwed up."<sup>(GW, p451)</sup> Sick and weak, she insists in participating in the cotton picking to earn money for the support of the family.

Ma instructs Rose of Sharon about her responsibilities in the cycle of life. She explains the terror, the loneliness, and the joy of woman's lot. While Ma acknowledges the pain and the loneliness that are in store for Rose of Sharon, Rose of Sharon's tears show that she has been touched by Ma's explanation, and accepted Ma's philosophy — the hurt and the pain do not matter because they are part of the continuity of the species. Steinbeck shows that Ma is infusing Rose of Sharon with her own strength and indomitability when she is sick, lonely, deserted and depressed. Rose of Sharon is reborn, so in the last Chapter, Rose of Sharon behaves like Christ, when the Joads come into a barn finding a starving man accidentally. Rose of Sharon feeds the starving man with her breasts willingly. "She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously."<sup>(GW, p480)</sup>

In Rose of Sharon's final gesture, she goes out of her narrow shell offering help to others. Her act accomplishes, through the influx of divine spirit. When the story comes to the end, if the Joads have lost in material terms, they have gained in spiritual terms. By creating these main characters in the novel, transcendental view on the significance of individual perfection is conveyed to readers by the author. Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Ma and Rose of Sharon are good examples to demonstrate the

transcendental philosophy that individual is most important element to society and self-improvement is infinite. A bright future of society could be seen at the end of novel in their self-perfection. They all realize that Egoism, therefore, is the real cause of human suffering and sorrow. The great mistake that the egoist-type people commit is to limit life to their own individuality forgetting that their individual lives are governed by the great laws of the universe.

## **B. Promise of the democratic Society**

Transcendentalism advocates democratic society with individual equality, dignity, and self-reliant spirit. Transcendentalists are optimistic about human perfectibility. They believe that the regeneration of the individual leads to the regeneration of society. And the emphasis on democratic individualism may provide an ideal explanation for the conduct and activities of an expanding capitalist society.

John Steinbeck creates a government camp in the novel. In the government camp a democratic society advocated by Emerson can be seen clearly.

The characteristics of democratic society are found in the camp. First of all, dignity of man can be gained. From the moment Tom drives the truck through the entrance to decent government camp at Weedpatch, barely avoiding damage to the old car because of a hump placed purposely in the roadway to cause drivers to slow down for the children often playing there, the atmosphere is different, decent and human. There are Sanitary Units with hot water and toilet facilities. The government camp not only gives the migrants a temporary safe place where they recover their dignity, they could wash, rest, but also gives the state and local jurisdictions the opportunity to bring in public health nurses to control communicable diseases. The camp offers an opportunity for respite from unbearable poverty and filth for several thousand of the most desperate worker families, and perhaps most valuable of all, it gives some of

them, through the genius and compassion of the camp managers and staff, back their sense of dignity and some hope for the future.

Besides, the camp offers the equal right to everyone there and freedom to vote. A series of elected committees, which govern the camp community, is run by the residents themselves. The author establishes a simple democracy, in which the camp is governed by a camp committee made up of representatives and the electing representatives to various operating committees dealing with recreation, such as children's playground, and children's welfare, and the governing board of the Women's Club. Migrants can get themselves settled happily, and their happiness is stabilized and their dignity is restored by participation in the representative government of the camp demonstration. No police are permitted to enter unless there is a riot. Moreover, a regular social life — square dance on Saturday is offered for the residents. People may take their wife and children or invite friends among the small farmers to the dance. People living there can work out, if they wish, and they can get credit through a co-op plan for up to \$5 at the camp grocery, where the prices are also fair. And those who can't go out into the fields are assigned other jobs, such as caring for small children. They give flesh to the vision of man's possible social perfection.

Universal love is another characteristic of democracy. In Chapter Twenty-two, when the Joads arrive at the camp, it is midnight and a watchman arranges them warmly. He introduces the conditions of the government camp to the Joads patiently: "There's five sanitary units. Each one elects a Central Committee man. Now that committee makes the laws."<sup>(GW, p304)</sup> And "Any preacher can preach in this camp. Nobody can take up a collection in this camp."<sup>(GW, p304)</sup> The next day, Tom awakes early and he receives a friendly greeting from everyone in the camp. Even he is invited to sit down for breakfast with them. Later, the newly friends share the job opportunity to Tom even though they may reduce their income for it. All men are good neighbors, responsive to each other's needs in the democratic society. There they are not looked down upon, and there they can restore their sense of self-worth by

treating each resident with dignity. They kindly welcome new arrivals. People in this camp are kind to each other. It is the basic element for ideal society.

The ideal for these people is presented in Weedpatch, the humane government camp, where the Joads begin to feel like people again and hope is temporarily restored.

It is the society hoped by transcendentalists. They insisted on the essential worth and dignity of the individual as a powerful force for democracy. In this respect, John Steinbeck demonstrates the same idea that a democratic society could be built if individual restores his dignity and equal right. And in the description of the Weedpatch system of government, the promise of democratic society can be felt and expected. One can not doubt the possibility of perfection of society, which echoes the transcendental belief that the regeneration of the individual leads to the regeneration of society.

## Conclusion

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, transcendentalism appears in American and brings a new way of thinking. American transcendentalism is an important movement in philosophy and literature that flourished during the early to middle years of the nineteenth century (about 1836-1860). It began as a reform movement in the Unitarian church, extending the views of William Ellery Channing on an indwelling God and the significance of intuitive thought. For the transcendentalists, the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world and contains what the world contains. The Transcendentalism exerts its influence on the consciousness of man and American literature. It inspires a whole new generation of famous authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and Dickinson. It pushes American Romanticism into a new phase, the phase of New England Transcendentalism, the summit of American Romanticism.

*The Grapes of Wrath*, a great work of Steinbeck, has embodied the three features of transcendental philosophy. Firstly, transcendentalism places emphasis on spirit believing that the spirit is present everywhere in the universe. The presence of the divine spirit is in both nature and the human soul, so man can get its intuition when sunk into the nature, and such self-understanding may lead to the perception of higher truth. Man can be divine when his soul is joined with the spirit of universe — Oversoul. It reveals the relationship between nature and man. Besides, there are symbols of the spirit of God in nature, for transcendentalists hold that the nature reflects the thought of God, and from which man can know the enlightenment God conveyed to man. Natural objects and natural phenomena are the vehicles of the thought of God. Thirdly, transcendentalists stress individual perfection and think that it is important element to society. They believe that individual perfectibility is infinite and the regeneration of society is on the basis of individual perfection. They advocate democratic society and show their optimistic attitude to the development of society.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck employs interchapters to depict natural environment like the dust and drought as symbols at the beginning of the novel to illustrate the moral barrenness of the people and their confusion about the future. It makes it clear that nature is connected with humans and human society. The forces of selfishness have eaten up the fertility of their souls. Perversion has taken root and rendered them rootless in their own native land. The author gives a description of natural phenomena from the perspective of transcendentalists' showing the moral decay with natural calamity. Besides, the rain and flood in the last Chapter reveals the enlightenment of God and nature has restorative influence on man, while the rain brushes away the weak and the dead, and the flood destroys immorality and corruption, rebirth and recreation occurs at the same time.

In addition, Steinbeck takes tractors as symbol to demonstrate spirit of man — mercilessness and cruelty, and turtle is symbolizing the spirit of persistence and stoicism. The symbolic of natural objects is delivered to present transcendental view on natural facts. These are hints offered by God.

Moreover, from the long trek from Oklahoma to California, the self-improvement and re-education of Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Rose of Sharon and Ma make clear the transcendentalism's emphasis on the infinity of individual perfection. These characters endure much death and hardship and regain moral in their inner world. They all show the strength of individual and its divinity through self-culture or re-education. Meanwhile, with the regeneration of their own, they bring hope and bright future into the society. Steinbeck sees the social problem from the point of view of transcendentalism, which stresses man's worth and dignity and love expressing a transcendental optimistic attitude to society

In the novel, Steinbeck also voices his revolt to dehumanization in capital society and his wish to establish democratic society. He extols the ideals of democracy and dignity, self-reliant spirit and self-governed society. This is the trend of transcendentalism. So a government camp as a model of democratic society is

employed in the novel, in which the migrants regain equality, dignity and democracy they haven't had in other places. It seems that John Steinbeck is showing people may live a happy life in a democratic society and his optimistic attitude to the future.

The novel is not only the tale of a single family, which is the miniature of the human society, but the spiritual odyssey of humanity from the lowest moral state to an elevated state of universal love and a mystic realization of human bondage and spiritual unity. John Steinbeck's comic view and philosophic ideas may be influenced by transcendentalism, for the three features of transcendentalism can be seen everywhere in the novel.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a very moving work, crammed with human tragedy and nature calamity. While on the long trek westward, the optimistic attitude to the future of human beings and society can be felt in its main characters like Jim Casy, Tom Joad, Rose of Sharon and Ma in the process of their regeneration. Self-reliance and self-improvement is an important aspect emphasized by transcendentalists which is embodied fully in the novel. Transcendentalists hold that the regeneration of society could only come through the regeneration of individual. At the end of the novel, the main characters have regained their consciousness and morality through self-improvement, self-culture, or re-education.

In writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, with the transcendental philosophy very much in mind, Steinbeck reveals that humanity is but a speck in a very large universe — if man suffers, everything around him suffer also. He expresses his optimistic attitude to the future by describing the rebirth after flood and rain and by creating principal characters vividly who are improving themselves in moral and self-reliance.

In a letter to his editor, Pascal Covic, Steinbeck says: "There are five layers in the book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won't find more than he has in himself."<sup>15</sup> And it is these layers of meaning that contribute a lot to make *The Grapes of Wrath* as one of the masterpieces of American literature.

## Notes

1. Jackson J. Benson, *The Adventure of John Steinbeck, Writer* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), p.376
2. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.83
3. Carpenter, Frederick I, *Steinbeck and Critics*, p.249.
4. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.83
5. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p75
6. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p75
7. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.81
8. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.83
9. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.83
10. Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking, 1946) p.29 (All the quotations in this thesis refer to this book unless otherwise stated.)
11. Chang Yaoxin, *A Survey of American Literature*, Press of Nankai University (1991), p.83
12. Charles Shively, *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work*, p.26
13. Charles Shively, *Steinbeck: The Man and His Work*, p.26
14. Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States*, p.100
15. Steinbeck, Elaine and Robert Wallsten. *Steinbeck: A Life in Literature* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1975) p.178-179



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