Book Review

Chadi Jabbour

16 March 2019

The Grapes of Wrath is an American novel written by John Steinbeck. John Steinberg was born in Salinas, California in 1902. He came from moderate family. He studies in college at Stanford University but he did not graduate from there. He went to New York City in 1925. He tried to establish himself as a freelance writer for many years but he got failed. However, he returned to California. Steinbeck published a series of humorous stories Tortilla Flat in 1935 because of which he become known to people. The series were about the Monterey paisanos. He used earthy and harsh humor in those series. After that he moved to more serious fiction which were aggressive in social criticism. He wrote Dubious Battle in 1936, which depicted the strikes of migrant fruit pickers on California plantation. Then he wrote Of Mice and Men by 1937, it is the story of feeble-minded giant Lennie. Also, he wrote the series of short stories collected in The Long Valley in 1938. Steinbeck's novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of agricultural work. He published his best work, The Grapes of Wrath in 1939. It is the story of tenant farmers from Oklahoma, those could not earn a living from the land and for that reason they moved to California to become migrant workers. He is the writer of East of Eden which was published in 1952. He also wrote The Winter of Our Disconnect and Travels with Charley. Travels with Charley is a travelogue in which Steinbeck wrote about his impressions during a three-month tour in a truck that led him through forty American States. John Steinbeck died in New York City in 1968[[1]](#footnote-1).

The Grapes of Wrath follow the Joad family's migration from the drought-stricken fields of Oklahoma to California's promising orchards during the Great Depression. This story takes place slowly, with detailed descriptions of the landscape and comprehensive dialogue between the characters. The novel is completely narrated in the third person. The plot of the novel is narrated by an outside observer with an all-seeing perspective. The narrator refers to characters with pronouns like him, she, and she, rather than using the first person's ego voice or narrator referring to you (second person). Third-person narrators may appear distant and disconnected from the plight of their characters; however, this is not the case in Grapes of Wrath. Steinbeck's narrator often and passionately expresses frustration with the economic institutions that have to weaken the Joads and others like them. The Joads and other migrant workers face many difficulties, but the characters take these challenges impassibly. They worry, but they are constantly trying to overcome their difficulties. Some characters, such as Casy and Tom, are trying to come to the conclusion that organized action against their tyrants is necessary. At the start, the narrator seems to be very angry and he always advocates resistance to the "big owners[[2]](#footnote-2)” because they exploit the migrant workers. He strongly condemns the economic system that has impoverished the Joads and declares: ''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[[3]](#footnote-3).''

Steinbeck uses the technique of dramatization in the prevalent chapters. He uses collage of vignettes, dialogues and monologues to depict the historical and social processes behind the events in the history of Joads. For example, in Chapter 9 readers can hear the frustration of farmer who were forced to sell their belongings because of the economic system that is out of their understanding, "Can't haul 'em back[[4]](#footnote-4)." The most conspicuous and pervasive style used in the chapters is language and rhythms reminiscent of the syntactic structures of the King James Bible. With the power and authority, the biblical voice, it is included in both final description of floods and opening account of the drought and this becomes the moral center of the novel. The strength and spiritual beauty of this language is clearly shown in the chapter 25. "There is a crime here which goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success: the fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange[[5]](#footnote-5)."

The unconventional structure of The Grapes of Wrath, in which the narrative chapters are dispersed with intermediate chapters of general commentary or information, has frustrated and upset readers to this day. Many complain that the chapters are interruptions in the story itself or that they divide the novel into two sections that are loosely related. In chapter 22, Steinbeck gives strongest comments on the nature of religion. Steinbeck illustrated his believes in the character of Mrs. Sandry. He shows the inherit failure of organized religion. Mrs. Sandry talks to Rose of Sharon about the "dancin’ an huggin" and in her discussion with Ma Joad, she says, "I can see your black soul a-burnin'. I see that innocent child in that there girl's belly a-burnin'[[6]](#footnote-6)." Ms. Sandry expresses condemnation and despair in the name of religious fervor. This anxiety and condemnation for Steinbeck is the fanaticism which contradicts the hope that people have.

I would recommend this book for another history class because it reflects history in which former farmer families from Oklahoma and the surrounding states moved to California in the 1930s for being driven out by drought, exploitation, poverty, and lack of opportunities. Steinbeck drew attention to himself through his classic history of the Joad family, giving names and voices to the many faces of the global economic crisis, known as Great Depression.

**Bibliography**

NobelPrize.org. “The Nobel Prize in Literature 1962.” Accessed October 30, 2019. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/biographical/.

Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd.

1. , “The Nobel Prize in Literature 1962.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. , Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Steinbeck, John. 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath.* California: The Viking Press-James Lloyd. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)