

Synopsis

American novelist, story writer, playwright, and essayist, John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902 and attended Stanford University intermittently from 1919--1925. Author of more than thirty books, Steinbeck achieved his first popular and critical successes with two short novels, *Tortilla Flats*(1935) and *Of Mice and Men*(1937). His major contributions to literature also include *The Forgotten Village*, *The Pearl*, *Cannery Row*, *East of Eden*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He is best remembered for *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel widely considered to be a twentieth century classic. The epic about the migration of the Joad family, driven from its bit of land in Oklahoma to California, touched off a wide debate about the hard life of migrant laborers, and helped to put an agricultural reform into effect. "A portrait of the bitter conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of a people's quiet, stoical strength, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a landmark of American literature, one that captures the horrors of the Great Depression as it probes into the very nature of equality and justice in America."¹ The study of John Steinbeck in this thesis centers on the themes and stylistic features of *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the whole thesis is divided into five parts: Introduction, The Man and His Works, Character Analysis, Artistic Features, Thematic Study, and Conclusion.

The introduction has provided some basic information about Steinbeck and his literary creations, including his status in and contributions to American literature, and his thematic and artistic characteristics in general. Also this chapter has spared space considerably to illustrating the main framework of and specific approaches in analyzing in this thesis.

In Chapter One, Background Information, Steinbeck's life and his major works are introduced, briefly covering his literary career from the early apprenticeship to his later masterly success. An outline of the story of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the best-remembered masterpiece of Steinbeck, is also included. At the end of this chapter, a brief survey of various critical evaluations of Steinbeck is offered to give some insight into understanding the present downfall of Steinbeck's literary fame.

Chapter Two centers on character analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*. According to their

¹ Letter to Elizabeth Otis, 15 December 1939, in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck And Robert Wallsten, 209 (New York, Viking Press, 1975)

due weight in the novel, two characters have been singled out for detailed analysis. First and foremost, Jim Casy jumps into our horizon, for without him, the novel is a book without theme, a science without philosophy, and a man without soul. Another important character Tom Joad, the disciple of Jim Casy and the executant of his philosophy, by his significance and proportion as the chief character also rings out in clarion for special care and treatment in this character analysis.

Chapter Three addresses mainly two most protruding artistic features of *The Grapes of Wrath*. One of the most peculiar artistic features of the novel is the display of many different, distinct prose styles, showing Steinbeck's mastery of the English language. Some of the prose styles in the interchapters of the novel strike amazing similarity with the Old Testament, sharing the same simplicity of diction, the concrete details, the iterations, and the balance structure. Some of the prose styles could be termed as a "chameleon of real life", demonstrating a marvel of likeness with natural sounds, colors and movements. The great variety of prose styles and subject matters found in the novel's interchapters not only has value as Americana, a faithful reflection of American life, but creates a sense of reality far beyond that of literary reporting. This sense of reality not only demonstrates the credibility of the theme of people's anger, but also imposes a feeling of urgency to prevent the impending revolution. An examination of various prose styles will, therefore, help us to understand the artistry of the author, and further our understanding of themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Another protruding artistic feature of the novel derives from Steinbeck's heavy employment of symbolism to strengthen its theme of wrath. The title of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* has its close connection with the Bible, wherein the symbol of the "grapes" has frequent appearance and rich contextual evocations. Steinbeck adroitly utilizes the symbol of the "grapes" to extract from Western people's religious background various overlapping biblical images, thereby adds extra persuasive power to its themes. By the title of the novel we might naturally become aware of the importance of symbolism as a main artistic technique, hence the relevance to devote special concern and care in analyzing. Three of the most important symbols conspicuously jump into our horizon: the dust, the turtle, and the grapes. Therefore, Chapter Three carries out a careful analysis both of the prose styles and the symbols of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Chapter Four contains two thematic studies of from different perspectives. *The Grapes of Wrath*, more than Steinbeck's other novels, remains viable not just in American literature survey courses, or in dusty corners of library but in the world of great literature, because in that novel he persuasively strengthened a universal theme whose significance continues to have relevance in America and elsewhere in the world, including modern China's social reality. As many critics have described the central theme of the novel as "from I to we" theme, I devote the very first part of Chapter Four to the study of it, and to

reveal what is also my firm belief that there is a love that goes beyond the confinement of self-interest, that there is a sacrifice that topples all conviction of sinful and evil human nature, and that there is a shining hope that never ends in compassionate hearts.

Chapter Four also deals with another significant theme: human mobility and its various impacts, which comes from one of my convictions of the purpose of literature and my intention to understand the novel from a new perspective of human mobility, an inalienable characteristic of human race. Humankind, as a species of unsatisfied curiosity, will undoubtedly extend their footprints to every dark corner of the universe. As a faithful record, literature, therefore, has no possibility to escape the universal theme of human mobility and its various impacts. *The Grapes of Wrath* succeeds in mapping down a journey, which, though regional, displays universal human emotions, suffering, and the triumphant spirits, hence, indisputably occupies its place in the world of great literature. We, by condensing the whole novel into a single theme of human mobility and its impacts, afford a new perspective, from the human mobility, an inalienable characteristic of humankind, to understand literature as a record of human lives, human needs, and human passions. The second part of this chapter is an attempt to serve this end of giving new understandings.

The Conclusion, the ending part of the thesis, tries to convey a tenet in creating letters that Steinbeck cherishes and has loyally followed in his literary career, namely a firm belief in ultimate concern to humanity, which is what I personally considered as something in which Chinese writers are lacking desperately. I have also expressed my wish of my countrymen and of greater achievements in our own language in near future.

Key Words: John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Human Mobility, “From I to We”, Symbolism, Prose Style

Contents

Synopsis.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One The Man and His Works.....	5
I. John Steinbeck’s Life Experience.....	5
II. Social and Historical Background of the Depression.....	8
III. <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>: A Short Summary.....	10
IV. Different Critical Responses.....	11
Chapter Two Character Analysis.....	15
I. Jim Casy: the Spiritual Guide.....	15
A. Jim Casy as a Christ Figure.....	16
B. The Development of Jim Casy’s Religious Belief.....	18
II. Tom Joad: a Fighter in Formation.....	19
Chapter Three Artistic Features.....	24
I. Prose Styles	24
A. Diversified Prose Styles in the Interchapters	24
B. The Similarities between Prose Styles and the Bible.....	26
II. Symbolism.....	30
A. The “Dust”: the Encroaching Destruction.....	30
B. The “Turtle”: Strenuous Effort, yet Steady Progress.....	31
C. The “Grapes”: the Wrath, the People, and the Invincible Spirit.....	32
Chapter Four Two Thematic Studies.....	36
I. From “I” to “We”: a Love that Goes Beyond the Confinement of Self...36	

A. Anti-Collectivism Forces	37
B. Collectivism Forces	41
a. The Philosophies of Jim Casy.....	41
b. Sharing: an Important Collectivism Force.....	42
II. Human Mobility: an Inalienable Characteristic of humankind	47
A. The Psychological and Economical Cost of Human Mobility	47
B. New Life Patterns and Human Behavior Associated with Human Mobility	51
C. The Problems Associating with the End of Mobility, the Settlement	54
Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	I

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要

Introduction

John Ernst Steinbeck (1902-1968), American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people dependent on the soil for their livelihood, is a major figure in American literature history.

Born in Salinas, California, Steinbeck was educated at Stanford University. In his youth, he worked as a ranch hand and fruit picker. His first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), romanticizes the life and exploits of the famous 17th-century Welsh pirate Sir Henry Morgan. In *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), a group of short stories depicting a community of California farmers, Steinbeck first dealt with the hardworking people and social themes associated with most of his works. His other early books include *To a God Unknown* (1933), the story of a farmer whose belief in a pagan fertility cult impels him, during a severe drought, to sacrifice his own life; *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a sympathetic portrayal of Americans of Mexican descent dwelling near Monterey, California; *In Dubious Battle* (1936), a novel concerned with a strike of migratory fruit pickers; and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), a tragic story of two itinerant farm laborers yearning for a small farm of their own.

Steinbeck's other works include *The Moon Is Down* (1942), *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *East of Eden* (1952), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), and *America and Americans* (1966). In 1962 he wrote *Travels with Charley*, a popular autobiographical account of a trip across the United States accompanied by a pet poodle. Steinbeck was awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize in literature. His modernization of the Arthurian legends, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, was published posthumously in 1976.

Steinbeck is best remembered for *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; Pulitzer Prize, 1940), a novel widely considered to be a twentieth century classic. The epic about the migration of the Joad family, driven from its bit of land in Oklahoma to California, touched off a wide debate about the hard life of migrant laborers, and helped to put an agricultural reform into effect. "A portrait of the bitter conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of a people's quiet, stoical strength, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a landmark of American literature, one that captures the horrors of the Great Depression as it probes into the very nature of equality and justice in America."²

² "Letter to Elizabeth Otis, 15 December 1939", in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck And Robert

Therefore, it is my interest to study *The Grapes of*

厦门大学博硕士学位论文摘要库

Wrath, with a focus on its artistry, its beauty, and its power. Besides the necessary background information of the novel and John Steinbeck, such as biographical information in first chapter, three perspectives to understand the significance and artistry of *The Grapes of Wrath* have been arranged: The Characters Analysis, The Artistic Features, and The Thematic Study.

The Grapes of Wrath, more than Steinbeck's other novels, remains viable not just in American literature survey courses, or in dark, dusty corners of library but in the world of great literature, because in that novel he persuasively strengthened a universal theme whose significance continues to have relevance whether in America or in modern Chinese social reality. *The Grapes of Wrath* tells a tragic, bitter story of the travels of poor farmers from the dusty plains of Oklahoma to the fertile valleys of California. In this long journey the Joad family gradually loses up their small possession, finds hardly any job, suffers the death of Grandpa and Grandma, and finally bears a stillborn child. However, in the process to fight desperately against oppression and exploitation, there are various kinds of helps not from the rich but from the dispossessed; there are so many examples of sublime human compassion for one's fellows; and there is the steady emergence of a concept of "We"—in the public sense group action to protect fellow folks' well-being by individual devoted participation to revolutionary cause, in the personal sense the help offered to others in sacrifice of individual, the "I". As Steinbeck remarked in clarion:

The Grapes of Wrath is also at its core a novel of a journey of poor farmers from Dust Bowl Oklahoma to the rich land California, a journey of various sufferings and hardships. Steinbeck makes his characters move through a variety of distinct physical and cultural regions to display an interesting theme of human mobility and its various impacts. By such a movement, the heroes and heroines suffer in forsaking their deep bond with and love for the land, are cornered into dreadful economic conditions. Against catastrophic impacts of mobility, the people, nevertheless, demonstrate astonishing perseverance, flexibility, and sublime love in adapting to the new environment. Being armed with an insatiable appetite for knowledge and desires to conquer mysteries, human beings have at their unconsciousness an impetus for human mobility. One day they might have their footprints on Mar, on Jupiter, and even the farthest unknown galaxy. Yet, the psychological cost and other impacts associating with human mobility will forever exist. The adaptation, the pain, the sacrifice, the love remain a constant theme of any literature concerning spatial movement, or ultimately movement in time, as revealed in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and therefore become an important field of critical study. Hence, it is our interest to investigate the desperate human mobility in *The Grapes of Wrath* and its impacts, to reveal the result of such forced human mobility, and to understand the courage, the fear, the love, and

the sacrifice. We, thus, start with the analysis of what type the people originally were, to study the deep connection between the people and the land, to know their essence as a people of land. At the second step we come to the topic of psychological cost of human mobility and the new life patterns on the road, namely in what ways do people change and adapt to the new reality of mobility. Last, we conclude with what the people have become. By presenting the deep tension between the immigrants and native of California, we can see how a people of peace have now become a people of wrath.

One of the most peculiar artistic features of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is a display of many different, distinct prose styles, which has its acclaim for Steinbeck's mastery of English language. Some of the prose styles in the interchapters carry amazing similarity with the Old Testament, sharing the same simplicity of diction, the concrete details, the iterations, and the balance structure. This similarity brings forth, from the deep unconsciousness of religion of Western readers, growing up under Christianity and imbued by Christianity, religious resonance and various biblical implications to readers, hence, produces artistically an extra persuasive power to the writing. Some of the prose styles could be termed as a "chameleon of real life", demonstrating a marvel of likeness with natural sounds, colors and movements. The great variety of prose styles and subject matters found in the novel's interchapters not only has value as Americana, a faithful reflection of American life, but creates a sense of reality far beyond that of literary reporting. This sense of reality not only demonstrates the credibility of the theme of people's anger, but also imposes a feeling of urgency to prevent the impending revolution. An examination of various prose styles will, therefore, help us to understand the artistry of the author, and further our understanding of the themes of the novel.

Another protruding artistic feature of the novel derives from Steinbeck's heavy employment of symbolism to strengthen its theme of wrath. The title of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* has its tight connection with the Bible, wherein the symbol of the "grapes" has frequent appearance and rich contextual evocations. Steinbeck adroitly utilizes the symbol of the "grapes" to extract from Western people's religious background various overlapping biblical images, thereby adds extra persuasive power to its themes. By the title of the novel we might naturally become aware of the importance of symbolism as a main artistic technique, hence the relevance to devote special concern and care in analyzing. Three of the most important symbols conspicuously jump into our horizon: the dust, the turtle, and the grapes. Therefore, Chapter 3 carries out a careful analysis both of the prose styles and the symbols of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

As to character analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*, we must pay our devoirs to Jim Casy, a Christ figure and the spiritual guide of the novel, and spare space of this chapter considerably to the analysis of his personality and his significance, for without him, the novel is a book without theme, a science without philosophy, and a man without soul. Another important character Tom Joad, the disciple of Jim Casy and the executant of his philosophy, by his significance and proportion as the chief character also rings out in clarion for special care and treatment in this character analysis. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I arrange a detailed analysis both of Jim Casy and Tom Joad.

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库

Chapter One The Man and His Works

V. John Steinbeck's Life Experience

American novelist, storywriter, playwright, and essayist, John Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He is best remembered for *The Grapes of Wrath*, written in 1939, a novel widely considered to be a 20th-century classic. The epic about the migration of the Joad Family, driven from its bit of land in Oklahoma to California, touched off a wide debate about the hard life of migrant laborers, and helped to put an agricultural reform into effect.

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902. His native region of Monterey Bay was later the setting for most of his fiction. According to Joseph Fontenrose in *John Steinbeck: an Introduction and Interpretation*, Steinbeck's father was a county treasurer and his mother a teacher. The younger John Ernst Steinbeck spent his boyhood in Salinas. With his family he made occasional exciting trips to San Francisco and more frequent trips to the Monterey peninsula—Monterey, Pacific Grove, Carmel—and to the Hamilton ranch near King City. He became familiar with Monterey County and the long Salinas Valley. From home or ranch he looked eastward to the Gabilan Mountains, warm and friendly, “full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation,” as he says on the first page of *East of Eden*; and westward to the rugged, towering Santa Lucia Mountains, “dark and brooding—unfriendly and dangerous,” suggesting death and making him shiver: they are the Great mountains of *The Red Pony*. His native landscape moved him deeply, and from it he drew a special quality of mind, which has suffused his writings. It is like the quality visible in other California writers—Norris, London, Sterling, Jeffers—an awareness of and sympathy with the non-human, with the physical and biological environment in all its power and magnitude, dwarfing and absorbing humanity. The boy Steinbeck was sensitive to every feature of his native region; in the opening of *East of Eden* he says, “The Salinas Valley is in Northern California. It is a long narrow swale between two ranges of mountains, and the Salinas River winds and twists up the centre until it falls at last into Monterey Bay. I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers. I remember where a toad may live and what time the birds awaken in the summer - and what trees and seasons smelled like - how people looked and walked and smelled even. The memory of odors is very rich.”³

He went through the Salinas schools and in 1919 graduated from Salinas High School.

³ These sentences are in the opening sentences of *East of Eden*. You may also consult World Wide Web, www.sacklunch.com/benm/benm_031101.shtml or <http://elkit.blogspot.com/>

He was always a good student, eager to learn both in and out of school, interested in books, music, science, religion, and sports. Intellectual interests were never discouraged in the Steinbeck family: not only had Olive Steinbeck, his mother, been a teacher, but his grandfather was a well-read man, as we learn in *East of Eden*. So John heard good music and read good books, discovering Malory, Andersen, Stevenson, Lewis Carroll's Alice books. He attended Episcopal Sunday School, since this Steinbeck family had adopted the Hamiltons' church; there and at home he acquired a taste for scripture that had a profound effect upon his literary style and form.

Between 1920 and 1925 he attended Stanford University intermittently, never fulfilling the requirements for graduation. There he took a year course (three terms) in classical literature, in which he was especially impressed by the Greek historians and Plato's dialogues, and an introductory course in zoology, a subject to which he devoted much time and studied in later years. His classes in English literature may have first introduced him to certain authors, but nobody, not even Steinbeck, can say for certain when he first encountered one writer or another, whether in his assigned reading or outside of class or before he matriculated at Stanford. By 1925 he had read widely in English, American, and European literature; he enjoyed Milton, Browning, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Jeffers, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, among others, including a few writers for whom his enthusiasm later waned—James Branch Cabell, Norman Douglas, and Sherwood Anderson.

In the intervals between terms of attendance at Stanford he worked at various jobs on ranches and road gangs, in sugar mills and the like, acquiring knowledge of the lower strata of society. He could get on well with all sorts of persons, and he discovered the genuine human qualities of humble people while working with them; he had no snobbery in him.

Steinbeck also took classes in writing at Stanford, and began at that time to send manuscripts to magazines, according to H.T. Moore, but he received only rejection slips in return. A story "Fingers of Cloud," which showed promise, was published in *The Stanford Spectator*, and so was a short satirical sketch. A few verse parodies appeared in *Stanford Lit*. This, of course, was non-remunerative writing. In the fall of 1925 Steinbeck went to New York City, hoping to make his living there as a writer. He arrived with just three dollars in his pocket, and his brother-in-law, E. G. Ainsworth, found him a job pushing wheelbarrows of concrete for the construction of Madison Square Garden. Then he worked as a reporter for the *New York American*, a position which his uncle Joe Hamilton, an advertising man, found for him. He was not a very good reporter, he tells us, and was soon discharged. After trying free-lance writing in New York for a short time, he returned, discouraged, to California. For

three years, periods of temporary employment alternated with periods entirely devoted to writing; and he moved from place to place, to San Francisco, Monterey, Salinas, Lake Tahoe, writing novels and stories that no publisher would buy. Finally, in 1929, McBride accepted and published *Cup of Gold*, a fictional biography of Henry Morgan the pirate, which Steinbeck wrote during two winters spent at Lake Tahoe, first as caretaker of a lodge (he was discharged when a tree fell on the building) and then as worker in a fish hatchery. *Cup of Gold*, however, brought him little money, and the next six years were no easier; for although *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown* were published in 1932 and 1933, not many copies of either were sold. In 1933 and 1934 he sold five stories to *North American Review*, including two parts of *The Red Pony*. In those depression times only the great popular monthlies and weeklies paid much for stories, and the *Review* was not one of them; still, “The Murder” was selected as an O. Henry prize story for 1934.

In 1930, Steinbeck married Carol Henning. His father gave the young couple a house in Pacific Grove and a monthly allowance of 25 dollars, and often this allowance was all they had to live on. The frequent discouragements of the next few years are reflected in the story of Tom Talbot, a struggling writer, and his wife, Mary, in a chapter of *Cannery Row*. Except for a brief interval in Los Angeles, the Steinbecks lived in Pacific Grove until 1936. Another important event in Steinbeck’s life also occurred in 1930: in a dentist’s waiting room he met Edward Ricketts, owner and operator of a small commercial biological laboratory on the waterfront of Monterey. In “About Ed Ricketts,” written two years after Ricketts’ death in 1948, Steinbeck tells the story of the close and personally significant friendship then begun. He went often to the laboratory, talked with Ricketts on all sorts of subjects, listened to his record, drank with him (both being devoted to beer, wine, whisky, and the like), and enjoyed many uproarious parties celebrated at the lab. The association with Ricketts stimulated Steinbeck’s interest in biology; out of it came that biological view of man which pervades the novels of Steinbeck’s best period, and Ricketts was the model for important characters in three novels (*In Dubious Battle*, *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday*) and a short story (“The Snake”).

In 1935 *Tortilla Flat* was published, pleased the reading public, and immediately established Steinbeck as an important American writer. Then his hard times vanished for good. From that year Steinbeck became increasingly affluent as each successive novel became a bestseller. His novels won prizes, became book-club choices, were made into movies, and were reprinted as paperbacks.

After the success of *Tortilla Flat*, Steinbeck and his wife moved to a ranch house near Los Gatos in the Santa Cruz mountains. Later in the year (1936) they went to Mexico, the first of many trips that Steinbeck has taken to foreign lands—France, Italy, Greece,

Russia, Scandinavia, England, and the Hamilton's ancestral home in Northern Ireland. He was an inveterate traveler, so much so that after 1939 he was seldom home. His wife divorced him in 1942, and in March, 1943, he married Gwyndolen Conger (Verdon), who became the mother of his only children, Tom and John. This second marriage marks a dividing line in Steinbeck's career. With it he ceased to be a Californian. Soon after the wedding he went to the European war theater as a correspondent for the New York *Herald Tribune*. Upon his return to the United States late in the year, he established his residence in New York, although he has continued to travel and has made lengthy visits to Paris. In 1948, his second marriage ended in divorce. He married Elaine Scott in December, 1950, and in *Travels with Charley*, written ten years later, he lets us know that in this marriage he has been happy.

Also in *John Steinbeck: an Introduction and Interpretation*, Joseph Fontenrose concludes that the shift of residence from California to New York has manifestly affected the quality of Steinbeck's fiction. The novels published since 1943 (with the exception of the first, *Cannery Row*, which, though showing signs of change, still reflects the earlier period) have been distinctly different from those published before 1943; and no doubt it was mainly the earlier novels that won Steinbeck's election to American Academy of Letters in 1948 and the Nobel Prize in 1962.⁴

VI. Social and Historical Background of the Depression

It should be pointed out that Steinbeck's long residence in the Salinas Valley covered years of both regional and national unrest, changes which he observed and later utilized especially in his most sociologically oriented novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. During the early 1930s, a severe drought led to massive agricultural failure in parts of the southern Great Plains, particularly throughout western Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle. These areas had been heavily over-cultivated by wheat farmers in the years following World War I and were covered with millions of acres of loose, exposed topsoil. In the absence of rain, crops withered and died; the topsoil, no longer anchored by growing roots, was picked up by the winds and carried in billowing clouds across the region. Huge dust storms rioted across the area, at times blocking out the sun and even suffocating those unlucky enough to be caught unprepared. The afflicted region became known as the "Dust Bowl."⁵

By the mid-1930s, the drought had crippled countless farm families, and America had fallen into the Great Depression. Unable to pay their mortgages or invest in the kinds of industrial equipment now necessitated by commercial competition, many

⁴ Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: an Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1973), p. 2.

⁵ R. W. B. Wilson, *American Geographical Study* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), p. 61.

Dust-Bowl farmers were forced to leave their land. Without any real employment prospects, thousands of families nonetheless traveled to California in hopes of finding new means of survival. But the farm country of California quickly became overcrowded with the migrant workers. Jobs and food were scarce, and the migrants faced prejudice and hostility from the Californians, who labeled them with the derisive epithet "Okie." These workers and their families lived in cramped, impoverished camps called "Hooverilles," named after President Hoover, who was blamed for the problems that led to the Great Depression. Many of these camps' residents starved to death, unable to find work. The economic structure of the Salinas Valley itself, the living place of Steinbeck, altered, as small farms were replaced by larger ones and the financial picture enlarged to include corporations, large investments and amassing fortunes. As the gap lengthened between the little man working for the big company, discontent also increased, with unemployment and threatened strikes

When Steinbeck decided to write a novel about the plight of the migrant farm workers, he took his task very seriously. To prepare, he lived with an Oklahoma farm family and made the journey with them to California. When *The Grapes of Wrath* appeared, it soared to the top of the best-seller lists, selling nearly half a million copies. Although many Oklahomans and Californians reviled the book, considering Steinbeck's characters to be unflattering representations of their states' people, the large majority of readers and scholars praised the novel highly. The story of the Joad family captured a turbulent moment in American history, and, in the words of critic Robert DeMott, "entered both the American consciousness and conscience."⁶ In 1940, the novel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and adapted to the screen. Although Steinbeck went on to have a productive literary career, and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, none of his later books had the impact of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Today, readers often find fault with its excessive sentimentality and generally flat characterizations, which seem at odds with Steinbeck's otherwise realistic style of writing. However, in writing this novel, Steinbeck attempted not only to describe the plight of migrant workers during the Depression, but also to criticize pointedly the policies that caused that plight. In light of this goal, Steinbeck's characters often emerge as idealized archetypes or epic heroes; the author intends to use them not to explore the individual human psyche, but to present them as embodiments of universal ideals or struggles. Thus the novel stands not only as a chronicle of the Depression, but as a committed social commentary on the economic and social system in which it occurred.

⁶ Interview, Robert DeMott, October 2 1974; interview and letter, John Bertheleon.

VII. *The Grapes of Wrath: A Short Summary*

The novel *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the specific story of the Joad family, featuring the hardship and oppression suffered by migrant laborers during the Great Depression. It is an explicitly political statement that champions collective action by the lower classes and chastises corporate and banking elites for shortsighted policies meant to maximize profit even while forcing farmers into destitution and even starvation.

Released from an Oklahoma state prison after serving four years for a homicide conviction, Tom Joad makes his way back to his family's farm in Oklahoma. He meets Jim Casy a former preacher who has given up his calling out of a belief that *all* life is holy—even the parts that are typically thought to be sinful—and that sacredness consists simply in endeavoring to be an equal among the people. Jim accompanies Tom to his home, only to find it—and all the surrounding farms—deserted. Muley Graves an old neighbor, wanders by and tells the men that everyone has been "tractored" off the land. Most families, he says, including his own, have headed to California to look for work. The next morning, Tom and Jim set out for Uncle John's house, where Muley assures them they will find the Joad clan. Upon arrival, Tom finds Ma and Pa Joad packing up the family's few possessions. Having seen handbills advertising fruit-picking jobs in California, they envision the trip to California as their only hope of getting their lives back on track.

The journey to California in an insecure used truck is long and arduous. Grandpa Joad, a quarrelsome old man who complains bitterly that he does not want to leave his land, dies on the road shortly after the family's departure. Dilapidated cars and trucks, loaded down with few possessions, clog Highway 66. It seems the entire country is in flight to the Promised Land of California. The Joads meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple plagued with car trouble, and invite them to travel with the family. Sairy Wilson is sick and, near the California border, becomes unable to continue the journey.

As the Joads near California, they hear ominous rumors of a depleted job market. One migrant tells Pa that 20,000 people show up for every 800 jobs and that his own children have starved to death. Although the Joads press on, their first days in California prove tragic, as Grandma Joad dies. The remaining family members move from one sordid camp to another, looking in vain for work, struggling to find food, and trying desperately to hold their family together. Noah, the oldest of the Joad children, soon abandons the family, as does Connie, a young dreamer who is married to Tom's pregnant sister, Rose of Sharon.

Degree papers are in the "[Xiamen University Electronic Theses and Dissertations Database](#)". Full texts are available in the following ways:

1. If your library is a CALIS member libraries, please log on <http://etd.calis.edu.cn/> and submit requests online, or consult the interlibrary loan department in your library.
2. For users of non-CALIS member libraries, please mail to etd@xmu.edu.cn for delivery details.

厦门大学博硕士学位论文摘要库