



Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de **The Ghost of**  
Fin de Grao **Tom Joad**

The development of the character's mythical aura through literature, cinema and music

Autora: Sandra Gómez Garrido

Titora: Patricia Fra López

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Xullo 2016

Alumna: Sandra Gómez Garrido

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandra Gómez Garrido'.

Titora: Patricia Fra López

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Traballo de Fin de Grao presentado na Facultade de Filoloxía da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela para a obtención do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas



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# 1. Introduction

In the research area of literature and other artistic expressions, I have not found many instances of analysis of the exchange between literature and music. Being aware of the relevance of this connection in contemporary cultural studies, I will endeavor to focus my attention in these fields and with that purpose in mind I will regard literature, cinema and music as equally fundamental cultural productions throughout the elaboration of this paper.

In order to convey the potential of this interrelation for the construction of works that eventually assimilate into culture, I intend to analyze an artistic creation that has undergone a transposition through these three different manifestations and which, in the process, would have acquired the potentiality each of them can provide. John Steinbeck's masterpiece novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) seemed a very accurate example. Until the present date, the story has been transposed to the silver screen by John Ford – *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) –, to popular music by Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen, and even to the theatre by Frank Galati in 1988. In this dissertation, I will not deal with the latter transposition of the story; instead I have chosen to go deeper into the web of internal influences that has developed among the novel, the film and the songs written out of the story of the Joad family as well as among their different authors.

The election of *The Grapes of Wrath* as the object of study was motivated as well by its relevance to the present state of affairs in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society. From the moment I first got acquainted with John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* it captivated me how the story described in the novel could be, except for certain peculiarities, perfectly connected with several episodes from the history of humanity, something that has made it appealing for so many transpositions to be made. In the story we are introduced to the Joads, a family that is forced to leave their home in Oklahoma after suffering the effects of the Dust Bowl and being given an eviction notice from the bank. The Joads, like many others, travel to California in order to find work and start a new life, however, their experience will not be very satisfactory there. As it has been expressed by Alan Yuhas in an article for *The Guardian* in the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication, Steinbeck's novel is still “a mirror to a country splintered by inequality, controlled by a minority, and facing climate “catastrophe”” (“The Grapes of Wrath is 75 years old”). Although the author focuses his reflection on the US, it could be also transposed to the current global situation, among whose disasters we can mention a refugee crisis, the violation of fundamental human rights, and the still existing consequences of the

economic crisis. The resemblance between the current social and economic problems and the ones depicted in the novel, has been argued as a solid basis to encourage the return of the story to the canon (Gossage 102). In the milieu of these hard times that sow despair and uncertainty among the spirits of the people, it is essential to recall the determination and demand for cooperative effort radiated by *The Grapes of Wrath's* inspiring protagonist, Tom Joad. Every story needs a hero, and Steinbeck achieves to create an unforgettable one. The protagonist possesses the courage and intelligence characteristic of a hero-like character, but he also presents other features that facilitate his reception as a realistic character. The most salient one has to do with Tom's evolution throughout the story from ex-jailbird to ordinary working man to actual hero.

From Steinbeck to Springsteen, all the authors that have decided to contribute to the diffusion of the marvelous adventure of the Joad family in their way to California, have tried to emphasize the heroic tenacity of its memorable protagonist. John Steinbeck's aim with his novel was to portray the deplorable conditions suffered by the *okies* – term used to refer to the Oklahoma migrants – on their California experience. The author expressed: "I've done my best to rip a reader's nerve to rags. I don't want him satisfied ... I tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written" (qtd in DeMott 14). In order to make his testimony as truthful as possible, Steinbeck did his field work in several migrant camps in California, and he got to know the harsh reality of the situation. The novel reports the okie experience and the conditions of the Depression in a documentary style by means of the so-called interchapters. However, far from limiting the novel to the documentary style, Steinbeck combines these with other chapters that narrate the particular story of his dear family, the Joads. The result is that of a masterwork that presents the heroic story of a family that accounts for the experiences a larger group lived during the years of the Depression. There are, however, opinions that disagree with the accuracy of Steinbeck's work. Some reproach the author's sentimentality and his decision to focus only on the experience of the Oklahoma migrants, ignoring those who came from other areas, thus instead of making the audiences aware of the real experience of the migrants, "they know the Joads" (McGovern 106). But the rebuttal to this argument may be simply that Steinbeck did not aim to describe the whole historical situation and the fact that the audiences have ended up identifying *The Grapes of Wrath* as the most recognizable description of the period points out at the important legacy of Steinbeck's work.

A tangible proof of the novel's success lies on its immediate adaptation for the silver screen. John Ford provided Hollywood and its audience with a film that was moving, and striking at the same time. Even though there are those who dissent from Ford's success in transposing Steinbeck's harsh topic,<sup>1</sup> the author himself expressed his satisfaction with the adaptation.<sup>2</sup> The film provides the first step towards the universalization of the story, as it will be explained in the dissertation. Moreover, Ford's film allowed for a greater number of people to get to know the Joads' story, since when it was released in the 1940s cinemas were very popular in America – around 85 million people going to the cinema each week (McGovern 172) – and in addition, a famous Hollywood, Henry Fonda, starred in the leading role. Among those who got acquainted with the story through the film, we find the folk singer Woody Guthrie, who had previously attempted to write a novel himself about his first-hand experience of the Dust Bowl called *A House of Earth*, which he finally finished in 1947. He felt discontented by the way Steinbeck had portrayed the dialect of the Oklahoma farmers and wanted to present his own testimony about it. But we need to go back to 1940, when Guthrie sees Ford's movie and said about it: "Grapes of Wrath, best cussed pitcher I ever seen" (qtd. in Swensen 160). That same night Guthrie stayed up in order to write the song "Tom Joad." – and he finally became the troubadour of the Dust Bowl by creating a whole album devoted to the period, *The Dust Bowl Ballads*, where the song about the story of the Tom Joad is included. Woody Guthrie's role in the history of these transpositions, thus, is to introduce the story into the corpus of American folk tradition by the creation of a ballad of its own.

Finally, the last link of these chain of works is Bruce Springsteen's "The Ghost of Tom Joad," the title song in the homonymous album released in 1995. Springsteen takes the major elements of the story in order to give voice – and a certain mythical background – to a Mexican migrant trying to reach the United States. Springsteen's act of translating the Joads' story from the years of the Depression to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century stands for the ultimate step towards the universalization of the story and the protagonist. In his song we can see how the influence of all the previous authors and creations converge. By recapturing the story

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<sup>1</sup> Gossage explains in her essay "The Artful Propaganda of Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*": "Pauline Kael remembers it [Ford's adaptation] as "embarrassingly sentimental." Andrez Scarris called it "New Dealish Propaganda [that]... has dated badly." Ford's biographers expected better control from the master craftsman. Scholars of film adaptations of novels emphasize its flaws and the compromises of the text made by the screenwriter Nunnally Johnson and producer Darryl F. Zanuck.

<sup>2</sup> "We went down in the afternoon and that evening saw *Grapes* at Twentieth Century. Zanuck has more than kept his word. He has a hard, straight picture in which the actors are submerged so completely that it looks and feels like a documentary film... it is a harsher thing than the book by far." (qtd. in Gossage 101)

Springsteen demands a response from the audiences; the song “connects the present moment to human history and suggests that all of human dignity is at stake” (Dolphin 49).

Therefore, the analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*'s through its transpositions will not only allow the demonstration of the complex interrelationships existing among the different arts; but also the process through which the story has been able to adapt to the historical necessities of the time, becoming a timeless solace and symbol for those who struggle against adversity. The great relevance of the protagonist in relation to the other elements in the story can be perceived by observing the change of the transpositions as reflected in their title: while Ford preserves Steinbeck's original, both Guthrie and Springsteen opt for the character's name in the title of their songs. The protagonist's potential has gradually increased on account of his crucial presence in the different transpositions, enabling the figure of Tom Joad to transcend the category of literary character and to be assimilate into the American cultural repertoire.

On that line, the ultimate purpose of this dissertation is to discuss how the character of Tom Joad has gradually become a major figure in American culture; one that reaches the status of the myth. In order to convey this idea, the protagonist will be placed face to face with different themes that are essential to the core of American mythology – the journey, the individual and the community, and the Promised Land – due to their relevance in the construction of the most representative works of American culture. The selection of these themes as the ones that will structure my analysis depends also on their presence and relevance in all the transpositions studied. Several passages from the novel, film and songs will be analyzed for a better understanding of the significance of these themes as well as the role of Tom Joad in relation with the plot and other characters in the story. In the section “Tom Joad and the Journey”, I will try to explain how the implications of the theme of the journey provides the pilgrimage of the Joads towards the west with a mythical quality as well as its relevance for the structure of the plot. In addition, I will contend the educational repercussions of the journey both for the protagonist and the audience, justifying the admission of the story into the category of the Bildungsroman and allowing its gradual universalization. Next, the chapter entitled “Tom Joad and the community” will be focused on the growing awareness of the character to the need of mutual help between the migrant families, facilitating the creation of a larger one, the community. Moreover, it will be explained the process that triggers Tom's gradual conversion into a working-class hero. The character of Casy will also play an essential role in this section since he is the one that



introduces the necessity of the people to unite in order to succeed. For a better understanding of the implications of Casy's ideas and Tom's attitude in the story, the section will start with a reference to Ralph Waldo Emerson and his essays "The Over-Soul" and "Self-reliance" since *The Grapes of Wrath* proves to be highly influenced by this author's perspective. This connection will also enable us to establish another link between the story and America's cultural tradition.

Finally, in the chapter "Tom Joad and the Promised Land", the development of a new conception of the term in the story will be discussed; but first, an introduction to both the idea of the Promised Land and that of the American dream will be provided, as they are two fundamental concepts for the understanding of American culture. Then we will explain how the migrant families grow disenchanted with their initial utopian vision of California, giving way to a new notion of the idea of the Promised Land.

## 2. TOM JOAD AND THE JOURNEY

### 2.1 The journey and the plot structure.

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) was included by Warren French among the “tradition of the journeying” (qtd. in Wyatt 6) alongside major literary works of the Western culture such as *The Odyssey* and the Bible. The influence of the Bible in the storyline has already been largely discussed (Wyatt 7) and therefore provides a solid ground for debate and the possibility of several interpretations to be made out of the narration. Besides, in the frame of America’s own mythology, Sylvia J. Cook (87) realizes that the Okies “are the descendants of the people who helped clear and settle the continent, who fought in the Revolution and the Civil War”. Despite Steinbeck’s original aim to present an unmediated story that described the migration experience from the southern states towards the west, the story has ended up standing for representing a far more universal experience. Steinbeck’s creation “elevated the entire history of the migrant struggle into the realm of art, and he joined the mythic western journey with latently heroic characters” (DeMott 31). The pilgrimage of the Joads therefore acquires a mythical and epic tone due to the use of such an effective imagery combined with the creation of honest and humble characters that are forced to face extraordinary impediments.

The theme of the journey acquires such a relevance in the structure of the story that it becomes the backbone of the whole narration. The development of the plot depends entirely on the movement of the family towards the west. Other scholars have discussed how time loses importance when the journey begins giving way to the term denominated as “time spatialized” or “space temporalized” (Fra-López 137), in which the author refers to the lessening of time references — except to the opposition between day and night, and Rosasharn’s pregnancy — and to the importance on the effect that movement has on space. However, the Joad’s journey begins once they realize there is no possible future for them in Oklahoma, which takes place in chapter 10 in Steinbeck’s novel and we have already witnessed Tom’s homeward journey; for him the whole narration depends on this constant

movement. During the journey, the truck becomes the new home for the Joads, the shared space where the members coexist: “The family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this car was the active thing, the living principle” (Steinbeck 104). This new “home” is also affected by motion, it is “active” and “living” in opposition to their ruined house in a land full of dust that they have left behind. The family movement develops all the way through route 66 and this is where most of the story takes place (Steinbeck 123-127):

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert’s slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight. ...

The people in flight from the terror behind — strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever.

This highway represents the path to a new hope, it is a place circulated by people deprived of their possessions, their home, their work; of their whole life. In addition, in this fragment we can distinguish also the general profile of these migrants. These people belong to an agrarian environment, the effects of the weather on the land has left them without resources. Consequently, they are unable to pay their debts so the banks, symbolized and embodied by the tractors, kick them out of their homes. The highway stands for their only possibility to start a new life. Even though there are several stops in their journey in order to try to settle in camps, they are always eventually forced to return to the road. The Joads are thus, joined by other people in their same situation, encouraging the creation of bonds among them and favoring the formation of new communities. The creation of the latter will be explained in the following section of the dissertation.

All the transpositions we are dealing with approach the importance of movement in the story and the key element of the road by different means. In the case of Ford’s film, the detailed description of Highway 66 provided in the novel with the interchapters needs to be conveyed differently. When we are dealing with description in cinema, unlike the novel, “screen time moves inexorably forward, carrying the spectator with it” (Chatman 42). Ford highlights the relevance of the highway by providing several long shots of trucks moving through it as well as shots that focus only on road signs that give the audience precise

information about space. This works as a substitution of Steinbeck's interchapters; the detailed descriptions made by the author in the novel imply the suspension of the story time. Though, as Chatman explains, the cinema prevents us from stopping the plot in order to give a detailed description, the use of these long shots exemplifies how "the shot sequence forms a narrative pause" (Chatman 42) at the same time that the storyline moves forward. Thus, movement is inherent to Ford's cinematic creation as well as to Steinbeck's novel since his plot is devoted to the demands of movement. Besides both authors manage to present a description of the main setting that suits their genre. In the case of Guthrie and Springsteen, we can observe the abundance of verbs that convey movement by means of their semantic implication. For instance, we find verbs such as "gone", "traced out", "walked down", and "run down" in Guthrie's song<sup>3</sup>; and also verbs in their -ing form indicating immediacy; this is repeatedly used in the first verse of Springsteen's "The Ghost of Tom Joad"<sup>4</sup> with verbs such as "walking", "going", "coming": "Men walking 'long the railroad tracks/ Going someplace, there's no going back". Guthrie's song is also faithful to the role of movement as the motivating force in the storyline presented by Steinbeck and Ford, and builds his song according to a cause-effect structure that ends up summarizing the main events that take place in the novel and the film. There is, however, no mention or emphasis put on the element of the road in Guthrie's "Tom Joad" excepting the first verse where Tom "come a-walkin' down the road".

Nevertheless, in Springsteen we find that the road is also a key element on the making of the song. This comes as no surprise since from Springsteen's earlier career the road has been a recurrent element in his music, becoming one of his most effective and representative imagery constituent. From his album *Born to Run* (1975) where his characters saw in the road a way of escape from their daily routine and failure, to *The Rising* (2002) where Springsteen's experience has made him aware of the potential of this image in the collective American culture, and henceforth he uses it to stand for a representation of future hope for the people. In "The Ghost of Tom Joad" the road is not a way of escape, an attempt to avoid facing adult life responsibilities; it is the path that leads to new opportunities. In the song "the highway is alive tonight/ Where it's headed everybody knows", people are not escaping, but actually determined to reach their destination, their desired new home. The fact that "the highway is alive" conveys the meaning that there is a never ending flow of people travelling along this road, a constant movement.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B

## 2.2 The journey as a Bildungsroman

The journey represents not only the physical transition from Oklahoma to California, it also stands for the gradual education of the protagonist, as is frequently the case in novels denominated as *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation. In other representative American novels such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) or *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) we can also observe the formation of the protagonist through their journey. In Mark Twain's novel, for instance, Huck evolves while he travels along the Mississippi river. I will try to justify the inclusion of Tom's journey in the tradition of the Bildungsroman. In order to reach this conclusion, I will provide a description of Tom's gradual change through the development of the journey as well as a comparison between his attitude towards change and that of other characters.

The first time we get acquainted with Tom, he is presented as a complete stranger, initially distancing us from him:

Outside a man walking along the edge of the highway crossed over and approached the truck ... He was not over thirty. His eyes were very dark brown and there was a hint of brown pigment in his eyeballs. His cheek bones were high and wide, and strong deep lines cut down his cheeks in curves beside his mouth. His lip was long, and since his teeth protruded, the lips stretched to cover them, for this man kept his lips closed. His hands were hard, with broad fingers and nails as thick and ridged as little clam shells. The space between thumb and forefinger and the hams of his hands were shiny with callus.

The man's clothes were new — all of them, cheap and new. His gray cap was so new that the visor was still stiff and the button still on, not shapeless and bulged as it would be when it had served for a while all the various purposes of a cap — carrying sack, towel, handkerchief. His suit was of cheap gray hardcloth and so new that there were creases in the trousers. His blue chambray shirt was stiff and smooth with filler. The coat was too big, the trousers too short, for he was a tall man. (Steinbeck 7-8)

Steinbeck provides a very detailed description of this unnamed "man". By the way Steinbeck describes his physical features, the reader may be tempted to regard this character as tough and suspicious. Besides, due to the description of his hands, the reader is led to think that this is a man that has worked hard. Next, the author points at the appearance of his clothes, underlining the fact that they are new. It also catches our eye that the man is carrying a sack, it

seems like he is going somewhere. Something similar happens in Ford's film version. The opening scene of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) presents a crossroads and we can see in the distance the figure of a man that is coming closer. Likewise in the novel, there is no mention of his identity until the story progresses and the character introduces himself. However, in the film, we are able to form a far more detailed image of the character through the figure of the actor. The physical features are now embodied by the actor himself and we are given a detailed description of his appearance due to the camera shots. It will now depend on the actor's interpretation skills as well as on the director's indications whether the first successfully represents the character or not (Chatman 112). Chatman explains that there is a relation established between the signifiers (actors) and the signifieds (characters), the first ones "resemble their signifieds in some culturally recognizable way. But the analogy itself contains a certain element of the arbitrary" that allows the role to be played by different actors (112). Ford's decision to cast Henry Fonda for the leading role has eventually caused the audience's immediate association of the literary character with the actor, which proves the marvelous interpretation delivered by Fonda. The consequences of the casting choice for the audience's reception of the story will later be discussed.

In order to describe the characters' personality, the novel turns to a method that is very similar to the cinematic style. The characters are presented through their actions and their relations with others, there is no need for a concrete, fully detailed description about their personality. This is also the case in the movie, without interrupting the storyline we get to see the interaction of the characters and consequently we can infer what their nature is like – for instance, Tom's initial dialogue with the truck driver may present him as a threatening character due to his nearly violent replies to the driver's questions, because he grows suspicious about the protagonist –. In the film, the fact that the audience at this point has only been given distant views of the character encourages this reception. Tom's following interventions do not help to make him look more sympathetic to the readership and the audience; he confesses to the driver that he has been in prison for killing another man. Significantly opposite to the novel and the film's introductions of the protagonist, Guthrie's "Tom Joad" opens by indicating that the audience must be sympathetic and feel pity towards Tom by referring to him as "poor boy" at the same time that he mentions his criminal record.

As the story goes on, we come to feel differently about Tom by observing his attitude towards the people he cares about. Before Tom reunites with his family, he bumps into Casy and then into Muley. It is in this encounter with Casy when we see the contrast between the

two character's perspectives about life. Casy confesses to Tom that he has lost his spirit and is now reconsidering the idea of sin and his role with the people. However, Tom seems unable to understand or accept Casy's ideas: "Joad's eyes dropped to the ground, as though he could not meet the honesty in the preacher's eyes" (Steinbeck 26). Right now, Tom's conception of life is biased by his earlier experience in prison, "Jus' take ever'day" (Steinbeck 95). The figure of Casy will be crucial for Tom's education throughout the novel. They continue to go find Tom's family but they find that his house is empty, the Joads are gone. Instead, Tom and Casy find Muley there. He tells them about the current situation: people are being dispossessed of their land and house due to their incapability of paying to the banks. Muley refused to leave his house; he functions as a witness and informs the other two characters, making them aware of the cruelty of the events. Tom gains knowledge and awareness. In addition, this is the first time that Tom is led to feel empathy, trying to understand somebody else's situation. In the film, this is also the moment when the audience starts to feel sympathy towards Tom: "Tom, the outsider like us, has become deeply involved with another's story; he feels the trouble as if it could happen to him" (Gossage 112). This identification process is combined with close-up shots of Tom's face expressing his understanding and concern towards Muley's situation.

Then, Tom finally finds his family at his uncle John's house, where, they are getting ready for the long journey towards the west. Everybody feels delighted about Tom's return, which may suggest Tom's importance within the Joad family. Of all members of the family, it is Ma who is more relieved about Tom coming home; this might be related to her main concern of keeping the family together. She also regards Tom as the man who presents the qualities that are needed in order to succeed in the movement towards the west.

Inside the family group we can differentiate two different attitudes towards the idea of leaving. On the one hand, Pa Joad and Grampa stand for the male reluctance to leave their land, as was suggested earlier in the character of Muley. Both characters are deeply affected by the dispossession of their land and are unable to recover fully during the journey (Fra-López 137-138). Guthrie highlights this feeling of displacement of Grampa's character on his song: "He picked a handful of land in his hand, / Said: 'I'm staying with the farm till I die.'" It seems like this "handful of land" has become the "handful of dust" that T.S Eliot talked about in *The Waste Land* (1921); this land, once full of liveliness, now stands for poverty and decay. Grampa keeps his word and dies before leaving the state of Oklahoma, this appears in the film, in the novel, and in Woody Guthrie's song as well. Pa Joad is also affected by

leaving and is unable to behave as the head of the family anymore. While men confront the journey in such a way, “women, however, seem to show a sense of conformity, though they are not contented with the change” (Fra-López 138), this attitude is perceived in Ma Joad, who states in her final speech in Ford’s adaptation that “Woman can change better'n a man” (Johnson 126). By reflecting upon this dichotomy we can infer that men show a dependence on their material possessions as they feel defined by them, “because Americans had long been basically materialistic, they tended to lose hope when they lost things” (Bogardus and Hobson 1). In contrast, women depend on their families and are encouraged to look for a better place if this is necessary in order to keep the family unit together. However, Tom does not settle for the general attitude of men and takes into account the opinion of all the family members. This independence from the land may be produced by Tom’s earlier experience; since he has been away from home for a long time, he has already learned to cope with this situation of displacement. For Tom, the journey towards California only means the continuation of the one he had started when leaving McAlester, which allows him to confront the situation with courage and determination. This is just another instance of Tom’s thinking of “taking one day at a time”.

Tom becomes aware on the road that there are many others “Doin’ the same as us ... Goin’ some place to live. Tryin’ to get along. That’s all” (Steinbeck 131) and they all eventually end up facing the same disappointment. Tom gradually realizes that his way of approaching life does not work in the present state of the journey. But since no other alternative comes to his mind, he still turns to “puttin’ one foot in front a the other” (Steinbeck 180) until he gathers enough new experiences that allow him to reconsider his attitude towards life and come up with a new one. This growing awareness is very much connected with the development of Tom’s class-consciousness that will be explained in section 3 of this dissertation. However, the need for work still makes Tom worry about the immediate present in contrast with Casy’s idea of sacrificing himself for a better common future. It will be after Casy’s death that Tom starts perceiving the world differently. Nevertheless, it has been argued that it is not Casy who provokes Tom’s sudden change of perspective, but rather “when his [Tom’s] conversion to social activism comes, it is the result of personal experience rather than the preacher’s rethoric” (Cook 90). Tom has, therefore, undergone a process of empirical education that started with his journey home. The climax of Tom’s evolution comes with the deliverance of his final speech, when he expresses to Ma this new awareness and his need to leave. Tom tries to make her understand by stating that he is



going to be everywhere, and there is no need to worry. Tom's farewell speech is the only fragment that remains, almost intact, in all the transpositions studied in this dissertation. We may therefore assert that it is one of the most crucial moments in the story. The original text from Steinbeck's novel has been transposed unchanged into Ford's film. It is in Guthrie's and Springsteen's songs where we come across versions of the speech that differ from Steinbeck's one, however the main ideas remain:

Then it don't matter. I'll be all around in the dark – I'll be everywhere. Wherever you can look – wherever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the houses they build – I'll be there, too. (Steinbeck 439)

Tom tries to make Ma understand that he is going to be present in every effort made by the family and those who are undergoing the same struggle. His actions will transcend the immediate individual survival in order to achieve the future welfare of the people. He understands that his initial philosophy is not fruitful and he needs to leave in order to reach an absolute understanding both of the situation and of himself. Ma, however, is unable to comprehend Tom's new ideas and sees in his departure the breakdown of the Joad family. This is not the end of the journey and thus, the education of the characters also continues.

### 2.3 The journey as an educational tool for the audience

Tom is not the only one who changes as the journey progresses, the readers, as well as the film and music audiences, are presumably also educated through their contact with the story. Getting acquainted with the plot and its major themes and with the inner struggle of its characters, the audience is led to achieve a superior interpretation of the Joads' experience. The different transpositions of the story have fostered the gradual universalization of the story as we will discuss in this section.

As has been mentioned before, we are subject to an exercise of distancing and identification with the Joads. This process achieves first to make us sympathize and place ourselves in the Joads' position and, moreover, to broaden our empathy to the large group of migrants who lived their same misfortunes. The readership that Steinbeck wrote for probably would regard the migrants in a very positive manner. In addition, being unaware of the harshness of their living conditions, the public opinion most likely would not have been

interested in the migrants' situation. On the one hand, Steinbeck accomplishes his objective of making the reader get over the prejudices he/she may have about the figure of the migrant by highlighting their positive values. On the other, the reader identifies with the Joads, regarding them as protagonists and admiring their great feat. In that way, we come to sympathize with the Joads. Steinbeck succeeds in widening the implications of the story with the use of the interchapters, which provide a break from the particular story of the Joad family and devote their content to a documentary-like description of the general experience of the migrants during the Great Depression. We move from Steinbeck's story to History.

In a similar way, Ford fulfills Steinbeck's aim depending on the different uses of the camera, which "negotiates with the audience" (Gossage 109). We gradually get involved with Tom, even though at the beginning he is portrayed as "mysterious and threatening" (Gossage 110). Those scenes<sup>5</sup> where Tom is also alien to other character's situation but tries to sympathize with them (Gossage 112) may be compared with our relationship spectator-character and encourage a similar understanding. Moreover, there are sequences in the film where we are "forced" by the position of the camera to watch the scene from the perspective of the Joad family. For instance, in their entrance to transient camp, the camera presents the scene as seen from the Joads' perspective, making the spectator feel that the other families are actually looking at him/her. The result is equivalent to the one reached by Steinbeck: identification with the okies and the removal of prejudices, if there were any.

Furthermore, the importance of the casting choice of Henry Fonda for playing Tom Joad and its effect on the audience must be brought into our notice. By the time *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) was released, Fonda had already been acting in Hollywood productions for five years. For the public, he had been Abraham Lincoln in *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) and Gilbert Martin in *Drums along the Mohawk* (1939), both under the direction of John Ford. In these two films, Fonda played the role of honest, hard-working men who fight for justice. The audiences were, thus, expecting to watch Henry Fonda perform a certain kind of characters that represented the moral values applauded by American society. Gossage explains that the choice of Fonda for the role of Tom "helped identify the migrants – those frightening strangers – as fellow Americans" (117). His heartfelt performance of Tom Joad was rewarded with an Academy Award nomination in the category of best actor in a leading role. Thus, the

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<sup>5</sup> We are not making a distinction between "scene" and "sequence" since the dissertation is concerned with the film content, not with its syntax.

background of Fonda's acting career, created certain expectations in the audience that favored the reception of Tom Joad as a heroic figure.

By suppressing the interchapters and other elements of the novel, Ford adjusts the story to the general requirements of the Hollywood audience and at the same time conveys the toughness of the Joads' journey. The audiences are expected to acknowledge the cruelty and the injustice of the living conditions of the migrants even though the film does not provide long descriptive sequences that appear in the novel, which were not necessary because of the public's previous experience with cinema, as Chatman (68) explains: "even unsophisticated audiences have learned to draw conclusions from relatively small bits of visual information." The film blurs the elements that position the story in the specific context of the Depression, and puts more emphasis on the theme of a family getting through hard times. Gossage reflects upon this broader identification of the story and states that it also extends to "the yearnings of the middle-class for upward mobility and traveling adventure" (118). Consequently, the film provides a more general reading of Steinbeck's novel, while maintaining the roughness of its content and bringing it closer to a wider audience.

Woody Guthrie formed part of this larger audience that became acquainted with the story through Ford's movie. His role in the process of gradual universalization of the story is related to the inclusion of "Tom Joad" in the tradition of the folk ballads such as "Jesse James" or "John Hardy" compiled in *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934) by Alan and John A. Lomax. Guthrie even took the latter's melody for his creation about Tom's story. This specific kind of folk songs have been described as it follows:

A ballad, then, is a story in song, written no one knows when, no one knows where, no one knows by whom, and perhaps, some may think, no one knows "for why." Notwithstanding, as the spontaneous poetic expression of the primitive emotions of a people, ballads always have had and always will have the power to move mankind. (Lomax, "Some Types of American Folk-Song" 1)

Both in "Jesse James" and "John Hardy" we are presented the story of men that have had issues with the law but, nevertheless, we are expected to like them and feel sympathy towards them, because their story is presented as heroic. For example, Jesse James embodies a Robin Hood-like figure in American Culture, providing the historical outlaw with a mythical tone. In the opening line of "Tom Joad", Guthrie also makes us aware of the character's criminal past, "[he] got out of McAlester Pen". Moreover, the ballads abovementioned present features that facilitate the task to memorize them. For instance, there

is a frequent use of rhyme and, as it happens in “Tom Joad”, in “John Hardy” we find the repetition of the two last lines of each verse. Guthrie, therefore, presents Tom Joad as the hero of the Dustbowl and at the same time introduces him in the repertoire of American folk tradition. The audience, thus, is moved to identify Tom Joad as a valuable figure of their culture.

The ultimate step towards the universalization of the character depends on Springsteen’s “The Ghost of Tom Joad.” Even though the other transpositions of the story motivate the audience to transcend the historical boundaries, specific information about the context of the Depression is presented. Springsteen succeeds at freeing Tom Joad from his historical boundaries and pointing at the existence of similar situations to the one lived by the okies in contemporary times. His intention was to denounce the experience of the Mexican migrants in the 1990s, portraying for the first time in his career “detailed narratives of working-class male heroes who aren’t white” (Seymour 74). Despite his initial attempt to make clear this specific situation, “*The Ghost of Tom Joad* connects the present moment to human history and suggests that all of human dignity is at stake” (Dolphin 49) demonstrating the universal nature of the Joads’ story.

In the first line of the song, Springsteen remains loyal to the other transpositions but instead of focusing on the image of Tom Joad or “a man” that comes closer down the highway, he starts extending the story limits by presenting “Men walking ‘long the railroad tracks”. The song gives no specific information about where these people are going, we only know that they wander the highway in search for a better place to live. Another difference with the previous transpositions has to do with the point of view; we are presented the story through the perspective of a narrator that is experiencing this situation. As the song develops, this narrator changes from “searching for the ghost of Tom Joad” to “waiting” on him and finally, after having presented Tom’s final speech, he is “with the ghost of old Tom Joad.” The narrator is invoking the figure of Tom Joad and everything that he represents in order to successfully fulfill the journey. The description of Tom Joad as a ghost, implies that his essence has transcended the physical in order to be symbolically present everywhere, as the character originally intended in his speech.

As we have seen, the four transpositions that are analysed have made use of the techniques provided by each artistic means in order to get the audience involved with the story. We can also conclude, thus, that since the publication of Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of*

*Wrath*, the evolution of its protagonist's reception has also undergone a journey that has peaked with the acknowledgement of Tom Joad as a character that goes beyond its original time-space frame as Springsteen presents in his song "The Ghost of Tom Joad". In what follows, we will analyse Tom's development towards his class-consciousness and his concern with the well-being of the community. The change of attitude presented by the other members of the Joad family – from "keeping the family together" to their participation in the community – will also be discussed.

### 3. Tom Joad and the community

#### 3.1 Emerson's over-soul and self-reliance

In one of his most influential essays, Ralph Waldo Emerson, main representative of the Transcendentalist movement together with Thoreau, talks about the concept of self-reliance. The essence of his argumentation has to do with the momentousness of the individual's trust in oneself. He emphasizes the existence of something divine in every man, a "gleam of light" ("Self-Reliance" 176), and the importance of being aware of it. Besides, Emerson explains that it is man's duty to "be a non-conformist" ("Self-Reliance" 178) and to follow no other laws than those which are urged by his own nature. The author also criticizes how men have desperately tried to value themselves in terms of material properties; by giving priority to these external objects and their preservation, men have dismissed their true inner essence ("Self-Reliance" 201). Regarding society, Emerson considers it to be "in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members" ("Self-Reliance" 178) since it removes any possible trace of individual freedom. The self-reliant man should be able to distance himself from the huge homogenizing mass and be true to his own soul.

However, Emerson is not trying to create a confrontation or rupture between the individual subjects. In his view, there is a superior unity that connects all individuals with each other and the whole Universe; the "Over-soul" (206). He expounds: "We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the

eternal ONE [*sic*]” (“Over-Soul” 207). With this statement, the author finds a balance between the autonomy of the individual – urged when he deals with the concept of self-reliance – and the harmony with the community. That “gleam of light”, which refers to the soul, earlier mentioned by Emerson, is again alluded to highlight its impact in every human being stimulating our intellectual capacity, and thus making us unique among other creatures.

The author next explains that the soul demands justice and so, he praises those who carry it as well as humility and love by claiming that “whoso dwells in this moral beatitude already anticipates those special powers which men prize so highly” (“Over-Soul” 211). Therefore, for Emerson, the feature that elevates the individual among the rest has to do with its moral values. In this essay, Emerson mentions again the presence of something divine in human beings declaring that “the simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God” (“Over-Soul” 221). There is a constant stress in the idea of acknowledging this shared, unifying force, capable of arousing the feeling of sympathy and understanding between all humans, “And this because the heart in thee is the heart of all (...) not an intersection is there anywhere in nature, but one blood rolls uninterruptedly an endless circulation through all men, as the water of the globe is all one sea, and truly seen, its tide is one” (“Over Soul” 222).

If we meditate on the essays above mentioned, we may conclude that their goals and intentions are deeply connected to the basic principles of American Romanticism, besides to the evident link with the Transcendentalist movement. The emphasis on the individual’s self-reliance in order to achieve success not only for its own good but also for the common welfare suggests a specific kind of relation between the individual and society. The role of the individual in this situation is crucial and demands involvement in the matters of everyday life in order to secure a society that is just and grants freedom for its people.

### 3.2 The family and the community

It is not very difficult to find a linkage between the concepts of self-reliance and over-soul, as well as the different ideas attached, and the story told in *The Grapes of Wrath*. From Steinbeck to Springsteen, we find several allusions that encourage the cooperation between the members of a community in order to achieve a general well-being. The Depression favored the reemergence of the belief in the community and this was of course very well captured by the writers of the period. With Steinbeck, as well as with his contemporaries, “a more positive characterization of group behavior emerged” (Cook 84). In their novels the creation of the unions presented a possibility of organization that would empower the people

in a way that could be unthinkable for “the exploited and impotent individual” (Cook 84). The *okies* portrayed in the story struggle to achieve some security in their lives but the only thing they encounter are unfavorable conditions that make their task even harder. From the very starting point of their odyssey, they rely on the closest notion of community they know: the family. But as the journey advances, they gradually become aware that the teamwork of the family is not enough for them to achieve the new life they are looking for.

The first allusion to Emerson’s idea of the over-soul in Steinbeck’s novel is made by Casy in Chapter 4, when he meets Tom after being released from McAlester prison. Casy was formerly a preacher but he has reached an inner conflict with the idea of sin and says that he has lost the spirit. Next, he raises the question of the “Holy Sperit” and finally concludes that “maybe it’s all men an’ all women we love; maybe that’s the Holy Sperit ... Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of” (Steinbeck 26). Casy expresses that he is certain about this, that he has reached this knowledge due to some kind of revelation, “all of a suddent [*sic*] – I knew it” (Steinbeck 26). Like Emerson, Casy agrees that there is a divine component in every man and immediately relates it to the fact that all humans belong to a superior soul that comprises them all. At this precise moment, Tom’s knowledge of the world does not allow him to understand or share this view proposed by Casy; it will be necessary for him to reach this conclusion based on his own experiences in the future. However, it is necessary to point out Casy’s crucial influence on the development of Tom’s social conscience. In Ford’s film adaptation, as well as in Guthrie’s song, we first come across with the “one big soul” being mentioned before Tom starts his famous “I’ll be there” speech already quoted in the earlier section.

After being dispossessed of their land, it seems that all that the Joads have left is their family; and that is why Ma Joad persistently tries her best to keep it together. However, as has already been said, little by little the family falls apart due to members passing away or taking another direction during the journey and this is something that Ma cannot stand. Tom is the one who is patient with her and tries to make her understand that this is something necessary for the family to succeed and that those who continue on their own are going to be fine anyway. Tom also takes into account his family’s opinion when it comes to making a decision to fulfill his mother’s aim of “keepin’ the fambly together” (Johnson 41). Besides, Ma firmly believes in Tom and though she sometimes may not fully understand his view, she feels relieved by his self-confidence.

As the Joad family encounters other migrant families, their organization and behavior changes, favoring the mutual help with others that are facing their same situation. Tom is the member of the Joads that suggest to the family that they should share their burden with other families. The first act of this cooperation between families in the novel takes place in chapter 13, after Grampa's death. The Joads had stopped to rest near a family from Kansas, the Wilsons. As they get to know each other's problems, the Wilsons mention that their truck needs to be fixed and besides, the Joads may not be able to make it to California because their truck carries too many passengers. Al and Tom come to a conclusion, but it is Tom who transmit it to the two families, adopting the leading role. Since Wilson's truck carries only Mr and Mrs Wilson, some of the Joads could travel with them. Besides, Al and Tom could fix the Wilsons' truck during the journey given that they know about cars. There is, however, no reference to the Wilson family in the other transpositions of the story.

In the novel, Steinbeck's chapter 17 helps to describe the means by which these initially enclosed families start weaving a series of relationships and rules that will culminate in the creation of a new community of their own:

In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. ...

The families moved westward, and the technique of building the worlds improved so that the people could be safe in their worlds; and the form was so fixed that a family acting in the rules knew it was safe in the rules. (Steinbeck 202-204)

As we can observe, families gradually established a home rule with its own "laws" that came to be known and followed by every member of the community. The families merged into one unifying group; they shared everything they had and took care of each other. They constituted a new extended family. Besides, it is interesting that these worlds were "built" momentarily and so their rules depended on how long the families stayed in the same place or camp. Depending on the potential showing capacity that cinema grants, Ford's film relies on the capability of the camera eye to present to the spectator the descriptive sequences contained in the interchapters of the literary source text. The director does not need to narrate with words every element that we are being shown because "the film image ... exhausts the total potential of visible descriptive details" (Chatman 39). From the moment the Joads meet these other migrant families who are enduring their same misfortunes, the idea of keeping the family together broadens its implication and becomes a matter of also helping others.



Music plays also an important role in the formation of the community. Even in the novel and the film *The Grapes of Wrath*, we find instances of people gathering together in the camps around the tunes played by other members. The unifying power that music has is undeniable and besides it is a source of hope in times of despair, such as is the case of the Joads and their neighbors. Springsteen is aware of this potential, and anyone who has witnessed one of his concerts can assure that they “are both cathartic and celebratory, and often described as quasi-religious communal experiences” (Murphy 198). His songs have gradually come to stand for the belief that “individual success could only occur within the frame of a community” (Stonerook 203). “The Ghost of Tom Joad” presents a narrative voice — “I” — that goes through a rough journey alongside a mass of other “Men walking ‘long the railroad tracks”. However, the song transmits that the supportive community is not there, and that is why the narrator invokes “the ghost of Tom Joad.”

Both the film and the novel provide the example of a camp that represents the closest to an ideal agrarian community for the migrant families. Even though there is nothing ideal in the experience lived by these families, this is the only place where the Joads arrive at a place in which their basic necessities can be fulfilled and there is room for enjoying the companionship of the other families. This is portrayed in chapter 22 of the novel by the government camp and by Wheat Patch Camp in Ford’s interpretation. The organization of the camp is simply explained in this dialogue of the film between Tom and the caretaker who welcomes the Joads (Johnson 104):

CARETAKER. Camp site costs a dollar a week, but you can work it out, carrying garbage, keeping the camp clean--stuff like that.

TOM. We'll work it out. What's this committee you talkin' about?

CARETAKER. We got five sanitary units. Each one elects a central committee man. They make the laws, an' what they say goes.

TOM. Are you aimin' to tell me that the fellas that run this camp is jus' fellas — campin' here?

CARETAKER. That's the way it is.

TOM. (after a pause) An' you say no cops?

CARETAKER. (shaking his head) No cop can come in here without a warrant.

In this camp, the families have access to running water, showers, toilets and washtubs; different committees constituted by members of the camp have been elected by the families.

They accept and respect these rules allowing for the proper working order of the community. The migrants are also free from the abusive power of the authorities since cops cannot enter the camp unless they have a court order. Basically, this is a place ruled by the people who live there. The cost required to be on the campsite is easy to obtain by working for the maintenance of the place, so that reduces the pressure of desperately having to find a job in order to have a place to live. For this self-government to take place, it is necessary to count on the collaboration of all the members, each of them ought to contribute to the compliance with the rules. Every person must carry out their duty inside the community, “the individual cannot act alone but must act in public before the eyes of others, where words and actions take on meaning” (Stonerook 199). It is necessary to be involved in the community if they want it to work.

Tom is surprised that his kind of organization is permitted without the intervention of the cops or the deputies, but also he feels really glad that Ma is going to feel comfortable there because “She ain’t been treated decent for a long time” (Steinbeck 301). There is even room for throwing dances on Saturday nights, which is another opportunity to bring the people together and make them forget the harshness of their situation for a little while.

### 3.3 The development of Tom’s class-consciousness

The government camp serves as an example of how people working together can achieve a worthy and just living. This was not the case in other camps the Joads had been to before, where cops even burned the camps people were in. (Steinbeck 292). The Joads fit perfectly well in this environment since they are eager to work and help others, “They are hardworking, not for acquisition but for survival and the pleasure of performing well. Only in *The Grapes of Wrath* do these qualities become politically class-conscious” (Cook 93). The migrant families have put up with too much scorn and mistreatment on behalf of cops, tenants and also Californians, who dehumanize the migrant families and are unable to feel sympathy towards them: “A human being wouldn’t live like they do. A human being couldn’t stand it to be so dirty and miserable” (Johnson 56). All these desperate families, hopeful of earning a decent life by working hard, only find hatred on their way. They are all reduced to the name of “Okies”, which “use’ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you’re a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you’re scum.” (Steinbeck 215).

Tom’s character stands for all those “Okies” that are just looking for a job in order to survive. Like many others, Tom and his family are informed of the need of workers by some

handbills that were distributed; they will later find out that this was only a strategy of the employers in order to obtain cheap workers, and they meant to pay them less than what they originally offered. One man explains to Tom:

S'pose you got a job a work, an' there's jus' one fella wants the job. You got to pay 'im what he asts. But s'pose they's a hundred men. ... S'pose the men got kids, an' them kids is hungry. ... Jus' offer 'em a nickel — why, they'll kill each other fightin' for that nickel. (Steinbeck 256)

Guthrie also emphasizes this broken promise of a job for everybody: “There was work for every single hand, they thought,” as they gazed to the California landscape. People who become aware of this fraud and complain or try to find a solution are immediately sent to jail or prevented from finding work anywhere else (Steinbeck 258). They are referred to in both the novel and the film as “reds”, “agitators” or “troublemakers”, and in them we perceive the seeds of the important role of the union and the class consciousness that will inspire Casy's and Tom's actions.

A growing awareness that something needs to be done starts to flourish. In Guthrie's and Springsteen's songs we find this urge of social commitment since their songs fulfill a double purpose: they present “an expression of pain and hope” but they are also “a call to action” (Dolphin 49). Guthrie himself expressed in a letter to Alan Lomax:

A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it, or it could be whose hungry and where their mouth is, or whose out of work and where the job is or whose broke and where the money is or whose carrying a gun and where the peace is — that's folk lore and folks made it up because they seen that the politicians couldn't find nothing to fix or nobody to feed or give a job of work. (qtd. in Dorman 145)

The question of the individual's duty is therefore crucial for Guthrie. Having been himself an okie like the ones depicted in the story (Lynskey, 41-42), his commitment with their situation is quite evident. The migrant workers, beaten up and unable to find help in anyone but themselves, must work it out on their own by every possible means. In Springsteen we find also the ambition to “reconnect individual action to communities ... and to once again value political action and the pursuit of the public good” (Stonerook 203). Thus, both Guthrie and Springsteen are aware of the social and cultural implications and that is why they turn to their “music as a cultural work to attempt to bring about social reform” (Dolphin 49).

At first, Tom's violent reactions towards those who mistreat him and his family may be perceived as inappropriate because we are aware of his past. However, as the plot develops, we come to understand his anger as a "moral obligation" (Cook 88). Both Steinbeck and Ford convey this reading by subjecting the audience to the process of identification that has been explained in the previous section of this work. Steinbeck aimed "to express his anger at the oppressors by centering on the admirable qualities he had witnessed in the oppressed" (Gossage 108). As has been suggested before, cops and deputies are the most evident agents of direct physical violence suffered by the migrants. They are also, consequently, the ones that Tom is more likely to get violent with and that is why Ma always worries when Tom is around one of them, in case he gets violent and breaks his parole. The reason of Tom's anger towards the cops is motivated by the fact that they are not following the law in a righteous way, "They're workin' away at our spirits. They're tryin' to make us cringe an' crawl. They're workin' on our decency" (Johnson 78-79). In Guthrie's "Tom Joad" we find a denunciation of the abusive power of the deputies that "fired loose at a man and/ Shot a woman in the back" — an event that also takes place in the novel and the film — later he mentions how they kill Casy violently and even refers to them as "thugs". Casy agrees with Tom disliking and not agreeing with the attitude of the cops, he thinks that "Cops cause more trouble than they stop" (Steinbeck 401).

Emerson suggested that the self-reliant man should trust his own nature and not settle for those constraints that did not seem right for himself ("Self-reliance" 178). Tom stands in this way for the self-reliant individual described by Emerson. While this trust in himself has been part of Tom's persona since the beginning of the story, Casy's figure is essential for Tom's awareness of the idea of the "over-soul". Casy himself finally acknowledges having understood and regained his "spirit" shortly before his death. His recovery has to do with the strengthening of a class-consciousness that led also to his awakening to the working-class movement. He tells Tom that he has understood that "it's need that makes all the trouble", all the "agitators" are acting in such a way because there is poverty, famine and no jobs to improve this situation; besides these families are treated without any respect and they are not given any chance. The result is a just and motivated wrath. The workers' fight for their rights will only be fruitful if people get together and "we all got yellin'" (Steinbeck 400). This superior unity of the over-soul is used to demand the cooperation and call to action of the workers in order to improve their social situation and to regain their dignity. Guthrie also sees how Casy promotes the union of the workers and in his song decides to put in Casy's voice:

“Us workin’ folkses, all get together, / ‘Cause we ain’t got a chance anymore”; presenting their union as the last chance for people to win.

At this point, and in addition to Casy’s ideas, Tom’s experiences finally ignite in him the notion of class-consciousness that, combined with his determination and confidence, makes him resolve to become the leader that the community and the Joad family need. This new attitude is reinforced in Steinbeck’s novel by presenting a scene that resembles a ritual of baptism: “He bathed his face in the cool water, tore off the tail of his blue shirt and dipped it and held it against his torn cheek and nose. The water stung and burned” (Steinbeck 405). The image of the water and that of Tom in a blue shirt may be interpreted as a symbol of his conversion to the working-class cause. His new commitment and the aim to protect his family urges Tom into continuing the journey by himself. He acknowledges the huge influence of Casy’s talks, and recalls him explaining how we all belong to “a great big soul”. Before delivering his well-known farewell speech to Ma, Tom tells her about other ideas he has considered:

I been a-wonderin’ why we can’t do that all over. Throw out the cops that ain’t our people. All work together for our own thing — all farm our own lan’... I been thinkin’ a hell of a lot, thinking about our people living like pigs, an’ the good rich lan’ layin’ fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan’ good farmers is starvin’. An’ I been wonderin’ if all our folks got together an’ yelled (Steinbeck 438)

In this fragment of Steinbeck’s novel, we can see how Tom has started to understand the need of class-consciousness and support of the union of the workers as the only possible means to achieve their common benefit. He is outraged by the conditions in which his people are being forced to live, while there are enough lands for them to work in. Also the few people who own the land prevent all these people from having a respectable life. They have been misused by employers and cops who deprive them of their rights. The only possible solution for the people is to get together, to cooperate in order to achieve the welfare of the community. For this to happen, it will be necessary to have a leader for the people, and Tom seems the one determined to become that leader. In his final speech, mentioned in section 2 of the dissertation, Tom tells Ma that once he has left, he is going to be present in every struggle of the community and in every act of rebellion by claiming “I’ll be everywhere” (Steinbeck 439). In Springsteen’s “The Ghost of Tom Joad” we can see how Tom’s main concerns are likewise portrayed:

Now Tom said, "Mom, wherever there's a cop beating a guy  
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries  
Where there's a fight against the blood and hatred in the air  
Look for me, Mom, I'll be there  
Wherever somebody's fighting for a place to stand  
Or a decent job or a helping hand  
Wherever somebody's struggling to be free  
Look in their eyes, Ma, and you'll see me".

He states the need of wrath as a sign of moral obligation, as a response to the repressive power of the authorities, as a way of regaining dignity. It is the means through which people are fighting for their freedom and attempt to build a life of their own earned by their effort and work. As well as being the peak of the storyline this is the climax of Tom's class-consciousness process, he is now prepared to become the leader of the people.

Ford's film, in contrast with Steinbeck's original source text, closes with an inspiring speech delivered by Ma Joad, in which the emphasis on the idea of the community is expressed. It has been often argued whether the end of Ford's film betrays Steinbeck's original harsher ending. However, in both we can observe that the essence is mainly the same. On the one hand, in Steinbeck's text, Rosasharn's breastfeeding an undernourished man illustrates the idea of helping others by presenting an act of communion. On the other, in Ford's closing statements, Ma Joad expresses her belief in "the people" and the strength and persistence they embody:

PA. (thinking of what Ma says) Maybe, but we shore takin' a beatin'.

MA. (chuckling) I know. Maybe that makes us tough. Rich fellas come up an' they die, an' their kids ain't no good, an' they die out. But we keep a-comin'. We're the people that live. Can't nobody wipe us out. Can't nobody lick us. We'll go on forever, Pa. We're the people. (Johnson 126-127)

Ford's decision to suppress Steinbeck's episode may have been caused by the demands of the Production Code of Hollywood. However, even though this scene is removed from the script, the selected imagery and themes are also extremely realistic and austere for a film produced during Hollywood's golden era. Gossage explains "this is a world where people, good people,

die of starvation, exposure, and abuse by the authorities; it is not cleaned-up, poetically just world of Hollywood drama” (105). Thus, regardless of their differences, both endings effectively convey the crucial need of the community in order to get over this austere situation.

## 4. Tom Joad and the Promised Land

### 4.1 The American Dream and the Promised Land

If there is a term that best embodies the spirit of American culture, it is that of the American Dream. This concept was first mentioned by the author James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* in 1931, at a time of despair known as the years of the Great Depression. He explains his conception of the idea as:

That American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it. (qtd. in Cullen *The American Dream* 4)

Even though it is Truslow who coins the concept, he acknowledges that the essence of the idea was already present in the origins of the nation. In the Declaration of Independence (US 1776) it was stated “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”. However, the term “American Dream” has been misunderstood in repeated occasions due to the ambivalence in the meaning of “better, richer, and happier”, and has been violated, and also distorted in order to use it as a political weapon. At the sight of such an expression, one might wonder whether these characteristics of the term refer to a life of economic prosperity and material possessions, or if this richness lies in the spirit of individuals and the achievement of their freedom. The promise of the dream that has attracted and still attracts so many to take a chance in America is not always satisfactory. Nevertheless, “ambiguity is the very source of its power” (Cullen, *Restless in the Promised Land* 3); it is the term’s uncertain nature that allows for its persistency and defies individuals to find if they have what it takes to accomplish the Dream.

Although it may not have been the American Dream as we conceive it today what originally brought the first Puritans to the New World, it definitely was the quest for a certain kind of freedom. The American land meant a new opportunity to start over, to create a new community in which they could celebrate God by following their religious doctrine (Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A* 55). They saw themselves as the new Israelites that would prosper in this new Promised Land (Allen 135). Allen has explained that the Puritans saw in America not a new material Eden achieved; but rather a Promised Land that “had to be continually maintained” (126). Like the implications of the Dream, that of the Promised Land have also evolved and been adapted to the different stages of American history. The historical background that has been previously mentioned provides the idea with a mythical air that increases the expectations of the new crusaders.

In this section, I will discuss the relevance of the Promised Land in the four transpositions of *The Grapes of Wrath*, paying attention to the gradual disenchantment of Tom and the Joad family with the initial image they had of the Promised Land. Firstly, we will establish a connection between the migration experience of the okies and that told in the Book of Exodus, which will allow us to perceive California as the new Promised Land and will endow the Joads’ story with a mythical magnitude.



## 4.2 “California is the Garden of Eden”<sup>6</sup>

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, families that have been dispossessed of their land move towards the promise of a new home where they expect to live with a reestablished dignity. The okies therefore appeal for the foundations of the American Dream – “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” – that ought to be granted to every individual in America and of which they have been deprived. Although, as we have already mentioned, the journey brings about nothing but obstacles and discouragement, the migrants eagerly cling to their idyllic vision of California. It will take several blows for them to grow disillusioned and start perceiving the territory differently. The story successfully achieves to provide the okies search for work in the new land with mythical connotations; this is made possible due to the links existing between the okie migration and that of the Israelite people in the Book of Exodus. Both groups of people travel in order to reach the new territory that they have been promised, escaping from a place where they could no longer live. But before that, they need to cross through inhospitable places that will test their determination and faith. The Israelites have to travel across the desert, facing such impediments that at times make them long to be back in Egypt. On the other hand, the okies make their way through highway 66 and, also they cross the dessert in Arizona. Highway 66 is even described in Steinbeck’s novel as if it was a prolongation of the desert like the one that appears in the Bible: “And the concrete road shone like a mirror under the sun, and in the distance the heat made it seem that there were pools of water in the road” (Steinbeck 127); it seems that there is an oasis on the road, but actually the atmosphere is dry and hot. In addition, both people are taken to this new land by a leader; Moses in the case of the Israelites and, at this point of the story analysis, we can state that Tom stands for the guide of the Joads and later of the people. California means for the okies, like Canaan does for the Israelites, the Promised Land they pursue.

As we have seen earlier, when dealing with the theme of the journey in the development of the story, on their way to the West Tom gradually learns and changes his behavior according to the difficulties encountered. Almost concurrently, the families come to understand that this new land is not as generous and kind as they expected. Their initial motivation was that of “Going to California really to go home again” (Steinbeck 162). In order not to be tempted to give up the journey when hard times come, the Joads console themselves with the vision that they have formed of the California landscape, “Jus’ think

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<sup>6</sup> Line from Woody Guthrie’s song “Do Re Mi” also included in *The Dust Bowl Ballads*.

about the nice things out there. Think about them grapes and oranges” (Johnson 38). In contrast with the barren land full of dust that they are leaving behind, this new place is supposed to be fertile and full of life. There are, however, times when the characters wonder whether this image they believe in may be not true in the actual California. As we can see in the following dialogue from Ford’s adaptation between Rosasharn and Ma, they cannot afford to have doubts about the truth behind this idyllic vision because it was the only thing that gave them hope during the journey:

ROSASHARN. Don't it ever scare you it won't be nice in California like we think?

MA. (quickly) No. No, it don't. I can't do that. I can't let m'self. All I can do is see how soon they gonna wanta eat again. They'd all get upset if I done anymore 'n that. They all depen' on me jus' thinkin' about that. (Johnson 41)

California is the promise of a life where the okies may be able to build a new home by means of their own effort. This opportunity to succeed that is available for everyone recalls the spirit of the American Dream. As has been mentioned before, their faith in the American Dream can work as a powerful weapon, in the story we see how the contractors take advantage of the eagerness and hope of the migrants by promising work for everybody. They spread the word that workers are needed there but actually they are benefiting from the huge demand of work to pay the workers very low wages.

Not coincidentally, after the Joads pass the desert that they find themselves staring at the actual Californian scenery, they are still amazed by its idyllic nature and the promising life that there awaits: “They saw the great valley below them ... The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses ... The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and the morning sun, golden on the valley” (Steinbeck 238). This new view resembles the lost Garden of Eden, filled with fruits, life and the presence of the farm houses, that means to the Joads the possibility of a life based on agrarian activities, like the one they used to have back in Oklahoma.

Ford is faithful to Steinbeck’s narration and also presents this scene after the Joads have passed the desert. The camera gives the audience the image of the family pushing the truck towards the side of the road. After that, it focuses on Pa Joad walking away from the car, suddenly his expression changes from exhaustion to excitement and he indicates with his finger the cause of this reaction. We are unaware of what it is until the camera moves from Pa to the image of a picturesque green field. Then, the camera presents again the truck and shows

how the rest of the members are drawn towards the view of the Californian landscape. In Guthrie's "Tom Joad" the connection is immediately established between California and the Promised Land:

They stood on a mountain and they looked to the west,  
And it looked like the Promised Land,  
That bright green valley with a river running through,  
There was work for every single hand, they thought

In addition, we can observe how Guthrie, at the same time that he presents the place as the new Promised Land, also emphasizes the fraud that hides behind by saying that this is what they thought, and not what they actually encountered there. Guthrie also deals with this topic of the truth about life in California for the migrants in the song "Do Re Mi", also included in *The Dust Bowl Ballads*. Moreover, in Springsteen's "The Ghost of Tom Joad" we also come across the term of the Promised Land. Unlike the other authors, Springsteen does not make reference to any concrete place, once again helping to universalize the story by not connecting it specifically with the California state.

It is important to note the relevance of the theme of the Promised Land in Springsteen's songwriting and the similarities that can be found with the okie experience. The most illustrative example would be the one depicted in "The Promised Land", which presents a quite self-explanatory title. In this song we find a narrator that is making his way through "a rattlesnake speedway in the Utah desert" and he expresses his belief in a Promised Land and his determination to reach it. He claims that he has earned his entrance there by means of his own effort and work. The odyssey through the dessert, the destination, and the narrator's attitude certainly sound very familiar if we keep in mind both the story in *The Grapes of Wrath* and that in the Exodus. However, as Matthew Orel highlights in his essay "From Adam to Jesus: Springsteen's Use of Scripture", the choice of the author to search a Promised Land allows us to develop different readings of the term that will be discussed in the following section.

### 4.3 A new conception of the Promised Land

After the Joads have admired the beautiful landscape that welcomes them to California, they soon set foot on the Hooverville – in chapter 20 of the novel – and are witnesses of a more cruel view that dismantles their previous idea. There is no garden filled

with fruits for them to pick in order to regain their lives through work and effort, but rather a dispiriting dusty scene in the camps, similar to the one they fled from in Oklahoma. The harsh reality that the Joads experience while being in California tears down the image of the place as an idyllic new Eden: “this ain’t no lan’ of milk an’ honey like the preachers say. They’s a mean thing here. The folks here is scared of us people comin’ west; an’ so they got cops out tryin’ to scare us back” (Steinbeck 262). However, this disenchantment will not bring their struggle and hope to an end. Tom and the rest of the community will be led to develop a new understanding of the Promised Land that will not depend on an unattainable utopia.

This new perception depends more on the attitude of the individuals rather than on the nature of the territory itself. The initial understanding that the Joads had of the Promised Land is the reflection of a widely general misconception of the term. By presenting the actual living conditions of the migrants in California, we become aware of the serious deterioration of fundamental American ideals such as that of equal opportunities for everyone. All is not lost, though; the possible ignition of a cooperative spirit among the individuals would allow for the accomplishment of this new Promised Land. Allen claims that “the promised land is not a utopia and is not a paradise; it is at once a physical place and an abstract concept attainable only by a community-oriented society” (126-127), which takes us back to the necessity of overtaking the more selfish idea of focusing on the welfare of the individual or the family unit, and facilitate the cooperation between all the members of the community.<sup>7</sup> As happened with Tom’s awakening to class-consciousness by the deliverance of his farewell speech, this moment also means his awareness of the improved postulation of the concept of the Promised Land. He finally comprehends that in order to “regain the blissful seat”, quoting Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, it is necessary to carry out a life in communion with the rest of the individuals. Springsteen himself shows in the development of his career a similar correction of his initial conception of The Promised Land. His first songs, such as those included in his breakthrough album *Born to Run* (1975), present a common “misunderstanding of the promised land as a dreamy utopian paradise” (Allen 135), like the one held by the Joads at the beginning of their journey. But Springsteen gradually corrects his understanding of the term conveying the meaning of a more community-oriented society. He expressed his mistaken perception of the concept in a live performance of the song “Born to Run” years later by stating:

I guess when I wrote this song, I thought I was writing about a guy and a girl that wanted to run and keep on running, and never go back. And that was a nice romantic

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<sup>7</sup> As we have mentioned in Section 3 of the dissertation.

idea. But I realized that after I put all those people in all those cars, I was going to have to figure out some place for them to go. And I realized that in the end... that individual freedom, when it's not connected to some sort of community, or friends, or their world outside, ends up feeling pretty meaningless. (Springsteen, "Born to Run Acoustic")

Thus, at the same time that Tom acknowledges his active role in the working-class cause, he comes to understand that "it was no necessary to lead people toward a distant new Eden or illusory Promised Land; rather, the most heroic action was simply to learn to be present in the here and now, and to inhabit the "wherever" fully and at once" (DeMott 34). The importance of being there increases its value by enabling the maintenance of both the Dream, and the Promised Land, that stands for an egalitarian and just life in a community shaped by the actions of its members. The effectiveness of Tom's intention of being present is demonstrated by the transmission of his essential values and purposes to others who also face hard times, like the narrator in "The Ghost of Tom Joad". The legacy of Tom will encourage those who are forced to cross their own deserts in order to end up at their Promised Land.

## 5. Conclusions

Since 1939, the year when Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was published, the story of the Joad family has unstoppably kept growing and expanding its frontiers, adapting itself to the conditions of subsequent historical contexts. It has also adjusted in order to fulfill the requirements of all the artistic manifestations that have tried to shape the story in their own way, facilitating its diffusion and preservation. But among all the features that make *The Grapes of Wrath* unique, its fascinating protagonist is the first that comes to mind when we think about the story. Through the different transpositions of *The Grapes of Wrath* that have been studied in this dissertation, we have ascertained how the story has been gradually blurred giving way to the preservation of Tom Joad as the main representative of the fundamental values and themes integrated in the original novel. The journey that originally took us to California might stand now for the journey of life; it might be extensive to the journey of every individual facing the difficulties encountered in his/her own educational process. Tom's attitude towards his family and his growing class-consciousness have provoked his recognition as a true working-class hero, whose courage and determination should be admired and imitated. And Tom's acknowledgement of the possibility of a new Promised Land renovates our belief in mutual cooperation in order to reach a better future together.

We have tried to prove how the different arts have worked together, and each of them provide their equally fruitful contribution in order to innovate and protect the valuable artwork that is *The Grapes of Wrath*. The story, as well as its protagonist, have surpassed the category of the literary to become mythological elements of American culture. DeMott could not be more right when he claimed that “Wherever human beings dream of a dignified and free society in which they can harvest the fruits of their own labor, *The Grapes of Wrath*’s radical voice of protest can still be heard” (40). The story has earned its presence in the American culture’s collective memory and so has Tom Joad. John Steinbeck granted us with a genuine character that dignified and underlined the harsh conditions experienced by a larger group of people. John Ford provided us with a charismatic Henry Fonda to embody the powerful figure of Tom Joad. Woody Guthrie convinced us that he was the true legendary folk-hero of the Dust Bowl, and Bruce Springsteen invoked the protagonist’s ghost making us aware of the necessity of his persona in contemporary times. Tom has finally achieved to be present everywhere. Wherever people are making their journey through the deserts life presents, Tom will be there. Wherever people are fighting for a just and community-oriented society, Tom will be there. Wherever people are struggling to reach their own Promised Land, Tom will be there.

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## APPENDIX A

“Tom Joad”, Woody Guthrie

Tom Joad got out of the old McAlester pen  
There he got his parole,  
After four long years on a man killing charge,  
Tom Joad come a walking down the road. Poor boy,  
Tom Joad come a walking down the road.

Tom Joad he met a truck driving man  
There he caught him a ride  
He said: "I just got loose from McAlester's pen  
On a charge called Homicide.  
A charge called Homicide."

That truck rolled away in a cloud of dust,  
Tommy turned his face toward home,  
He met Preacher Casey and they had a little drink,  
But they found that his family they was gone.  
He found that his family they was gone.

He found his mother's old fashion shoe  
Found his daddy's hat.  
And he found little Muley and Muley said:  
"They've been tractored out by the cats.  
They've been tractored out by the cats."

Tom Joad walked down to the neighbor-farm  
Found his family.  
They took Preacher Casey and loaded in a car  
And his mother said "We got to git away."  
His mother said "We got to get away."

Now the twelve of the Joads made a mighty heavy load

But Grandpa Joad did cry.  
He picked up a handful of land in his hand  
Said: "I'm stayin' with the farm till I die.  
Yes, I'm stayin' with my farm till I die."

They fed him short ribs and coffee and soothing syrup;  
And Grandpa Joad did die.  
They buried Grandpa Joad by the side of the road,  
Buried Grandma on the California side,  
They buried Grandma on the California side.

They stood on a Mountain and they looked to the West  
And it looked like the promised land.  
That bright green valley with a river running through,  
There was work for every single hand, they thought.  
There was work for every single hand.

The Joads rolled away to Jungle Camp,  
There they cooked a stew.  
And the Hungry Little Kids of the Jungle Camp  
Said: "We'd like to have some too."  
Said: "We'd like to have some too."

Now a Deputy Sheriff fired loose at a man  
Shot a woman in the back.  
Before he could take his aim again  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.  
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.  
They handcuffed Casey and they took him to Jail  
And then he got away.  
And he met Tom Joad on the old river bridge,  
And these few words he did say, Poor boy.  
These few words he did say.

"I preached for the Lord a mighty long time.  
Preached about the rich and the poor.  
Us workin' folks is all get together  
Cause we ain't got a chance anymore.  
We ain't got a chance anymore."

The Deputies come and Tom and Casey run  
To the bridge where the water run down.  
But the vigilante they hit Casey with a club,  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.  
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.

Tom Joad he grabbed that Deputy's club  
Hit him over the head.  
Tom Joad took flight in the dark rainy night  
A Deputy and a Preacher lying dead. Two men.  
A Deputy and a Preacher lying dead.

Tom run back where his mother was asleep  
He woke her up out of bed.  
Then he kissed goodbye to the mother that he loved  
Said what Preacher Casey said, Tom Joad.  
He said what Preacher Casey said.

"Ever'body might be just one big soul  
Well it looks that a way to me.  
Everywhere that you look in the day or night  
That's where I'm gonna be, Ma,  
That's where I'm gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry  
Wherever people ain't free.  
Wherever men are fightin' for their rights  
That's where I'm gonna, be, Ma.

That's where I'm a-gonna be."

## APPENDIX B

“The Ghost of Tom Joad”, Bruce Springsteen

Men walkin' 'long the railroad tracks  
Goin' someplace, there's no goin' back  
Highway Patrol choppers comin' up over the ridge  
Hot soup on a campfire under the bridge  
Shelter line stretchin' 'round the corner  
Welcome to the new world order  
Families sleepin' in their cars in the southwest  
No home, no job, no peace, no rest

Well the highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
Searchin' for the ghost of Tom Joad

He pulls a prayer book out of his sleepin' bag  
Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag  
Waitin' for when the last shall be first and the first shall be last  
In a cardboard box 'neath the underpass  
You got a one way ticket to the promised land  
You got a hole in your belly and a gun in your hand  
Sleeping on a pillow of solid rock  
Bathin' in the city's aqueduct

The highway is alive tonight  
But where it's headed everybody knows  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
Waitin' on the ghost of Tom Joad

Now Tom said, "Mom, wherever there's a cop beatin' a guy  
Wherever a hungry new born baby cries  
Where there's a fight 'gainst the blood and hatred in the air

Look for me mom I'll be there.  
Wherever somebody's fightin' for a place to stand  
Or a decent job or a helpin' hand.  
Wherever somebody's strugglin' to be free,  
Look in their eyes ma you'll see me."

Well the highway is alive tonight  
Where it's headed everybody knows  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
With the ghost of old Tom Joad

Well the highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes  
I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light  
With the ghost of old Tom Joad