

The Use of the Bible in Two Selected Novels of Steinbeck

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1. Introduction:

The Bible has long inspired artists of every descriptions to portray our fallible human life. Many sections of the Bible are made up of narrative, it is natural that its influences will find their ways into a rang of literature. There are some novels that put biblical chapters into different contexts, and others use biblical themes without acknowledging the debt to the Bible. Steinbeck's *East of Eden* is not the only novel to use the Cain- Able and prodigal son stories, Jeffery Archer also used the same theme in his *Kane and Able*. There are other themes inspired from the Bible that strongly bound up in human life, such as: building Soloman's temple or Noah's Ark, the stories of men's and women's betrayals ; Eve's seducing Adam to eat from the forbidden tree; Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son, all these are common themes in English Literature.

John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in California. He attended Stanford University on and off between 1919 and 1925, but never completed his degree in biology. He wrote many stories and novels about places he loved in California, such as *Of Mice and Men* and *East of Eden*. He published *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939. In 1940, Steinbeck received both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for it. In 1962 he won a Nobel Prize in literature for his lifetime of writing achievements. He died in 1968⁽¹⁾.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, one of Steinbeck's famous novels, there is a description of a migrant farming family during the Dust

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Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s. The Joads, our main characters, are the people through which the novel is conveyed. They have been fed false hopes towards the promised land of California. The novel is the description of this pilgrimage and the snags they face along the way. The Joads become very impoverished and the only hope for survival is the hold they have to each other.

The novel is partly a naturalistic epic and partly a dissenting tract. Moreover, it may also be considered as part of a romantic gospel. It presents the story of the Joads' brutal migration from Oklahoma's destroying Dust Bowl to California's corrupt promised land. In their ironic Exodus from home to homelessness, from selfishness to communal love, from "I" to "we", Steinbeck's cast all dream of a dignified society in which they can harvest the fruits of their labour. As a dashed illusion, thwarted desires, inhuman suffering and betrayed promises - all strung on the most fragile thread of hope. *The Grapes of Wrath* is not only a piece of art, but, beyond that, has few peers in American fiction²¹.

The Dust Bowl (a term coined by Reporter Robert Geiger) was an ecological disaster occurring in the 1930's in plain states such as Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. It was caused by many years of misuse and abuse

of the land. There was nothing to hold the soil in place, so when the winds blew, the dry soil was swept up, creating dust storms. The people had to lock themselves in their houses until the dust blew over. When the winds finally stopped, piles of dirt had blown up against the sides of houses, sometimes burying cars. Dead animals lay everywhere. It did not rain for another five years. Farms become useless and families were forced to leave their homes, much like the Joad family,

2. *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Bible:

2.1. The Title of the Novel:-

One of the most important parts of a book is its title. Some authors give a title that can only be understood once the book has been read. John Steinbeck, the author of *The Grapes of Wrath*, is no exception. *The Grapes of Wrath* as a title was originally derived

from the song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" which was written during the Civil War by Julia Howe. Julia and her husband were part of the U.S. sanitary. She visited many army union camps, when soldiers, who had read her poetry, asked her to write a song for the war. So, she wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"⁴¹. Since she was very religious, Julia translated her religion in her song which is clear in this song including the title, "Hymn" usually refers to lyrics sung in churches. Also, she mentioned "The Lord", and has capitalized the deixis "He" which refers to God:

"Mine eyes had seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord:"
"He is trampling out of the
vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored:" (L: 1-2)

Again the song refers to Christ who died so that everyone's sin would be forgiven:

As He died to make men
holy, let us
die to make men free
While God is marching
on. (L: 19-20)

Another connection between the novel and the song is the lyric:

*I have seen Him in the Watch-fired of
a hundred circling camps (L: 5)*

This indicates how God is everywhere. We can find a similar quotation in the novel:

*Then I'll be all roun' in the dark.
I'll be ever' where wherever
You look. Wherever they's
a fight so hungry people
can eat, I'll be there.
Wherever they's a cop
beaten' up a
guy, I'll be
there.
If Casy knowed, why,*

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*I'll be in the way guys
Yell when they're mad
an' – I'll be in the way kids
laugh when they're hungry an'
they
know supper's ready. An' when
our
folks eat the stuff they raise an'
live in the houses they build-
why,
I'll be there (**The Grapes**, P.
537)⁽⁵⁾*

In this quotation Tom is trying to comfort everybody by assuming that they can depend on him just like people depends on God. He is picturing himself as the savior of people, that he can see and help all. He promises to be there for everybody.

Although Steinbeck derived the title of his novel from the lyric of the song "he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored" (L; 2), Howe must have taken the image from the Bible. According to the Old Testament there is a passage related to grapes and the wrath of God;

The Book of Revelation:

*And the angel thrust in his
sickle into the
earth, and gathered the
vine of the earth,
and cast it into the great
winepress of
the wrath of God. (14;
19)⁽⁶⁾.*

The grapes are first mentioned in the novel at the end of chapter 25

when Grampa was expressing his desire to squash a big bunch of grapes
and let them run off his chin.

*.... and in the eyes of the
hungry
there is a growing wrath.in the
Souls of the people the grapes of
Wrath are filling and g rowing
heavy,
growing heavy for the vintage.
(The Grapes, P. 449)*

Such lines were referred to in the Bible:-

Deuteronomy:-

*Their grapes of gall, their
clusters
Are bitter. Their win is
position
of serpents..... (32:
32).*

And in Jeremiah:-

*The father have been eaten
sour grapes and their
children's
teeth are sent on edge (31;
29).*

Grapes in this novel are metaphorical. When the Joads originally decide to make the long journey to California, Grandpa sets a significant scene;

Know what I'm a — gonna do? I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full of Grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, and scrooge aroun', an' let the juice run down my pants. (The Grapes, P. 119)

The metaphor is found in the grapes itself being a relief from the long journey about to start, instead of filling the tub with water, he wishes to fill it with wine (grapes). Grapes also show a higher social standing by making the implication that they will be able to enjoy such simple pleasures and most likely drink of the expensive wines

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of the California vineyards. So, the grapes are the Joad's stronghold and what keeps them passing on in their trip. They are their hope to achieve their dream.

The "wrath" part of the title represents the actuality of the journey, not the dream as the grapes do. Throughout their journey the Joads go through lots of difficulties that raise certain emotions such as violence, resentful anger, rage, and fury; these all relate to the "wrath" part of the title. In spite of all these worries and downfalls, they carry on with their hopes (grapes), realizing that grapes were the cause of all their hurt. Because it is their dreams (grapes) that have scorned them with wrath (Ultimate demise), the title, *The Grapes of Wrath* is very fitting.

2.2. *The Exodus Journey*:-

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck utilizes Biblical imagery and allusion to illustrate the struggle of the Joad family as a direct parallel to that of some Biblical references. Steinbeck has used parallels to his characters from the Bible. First of all, the novel is divided into three parts; the drought in Oklahoma which stopped them from working in their farms (chapter 1-11), the Joad's journey to California (12 - 18), and the Joad's experience as migrant laborers in California, their Promised Land. (19 - 30). *The Grapes of Wrath* begins in drought and ends in flood which raises a critical issue that the story could be a retelling of the Biblical Exodus journey. Peter Lisca has noted that the novel reflects the three parts of the Old Testament Exodus account which includes captivity, journey, and the Promised Land⁽⁷⁾. The Joad's story resembles that of the Hebrews. Just as the later were captives of Pharaoh, the Joad's are captives of their own farm. Both make long journeys until they reach their Promised Land. Setting out on Route 66, the Joads and other Okies wander through the wilderness of the American southwest, cross the desert, and finally arrive in the Promised Land of California.

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66 - the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield -over the red

lands and the gray lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

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 hour up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road the road of flight. (*The Grapes*, P. 160-161).

This quotation shows Steinbeck's success to merge deep mythical concerns with the American experience. In *The Grapes of Wrath* he has indulged biblical, historical and mythical allusions with the American reality of poverty and depression. This part of the tale (the road) had little historical authenticity. In fact, Steinbeck exaggerated in describing Route 66 in order to give the story religious back-up, so that to put the reader in the picture and to enable him to contrast the suffering of this journey with that of the Exodus.

The Route 66 was not a Biblical Camel track, but a highway that was built since the 1920s. Moreover It provides a direct route from the southwest to the California coast. Steinbeck treats the road like a covered wagon trail than the fast, modern highway it actually was. In reality, if their car was in good shape, an Oklahoma family in the 1930s could make it to California in three days, rather than taking weeks yarning about their hardships with other travelers and singing folk songs around campfires⁸.

Along the way, they set up roadside camps where they devise certain laws to govern themselves. Grandpa and Grandma die before they reach the Promised Land. As the Joads drive into this new Eden, Tom runs over a rattle snake which is suggestion that this Eden is free of evil.

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2.3. *Biblical Characters:-*

As the Joads leave their land they mount the truck two by two, as Noah Joad observes from the ground. Chapter (10) is almost an allusion to the story of Noah's Ark;

..... *the rest swarmed up on top of the load, Connie and Rose of Sharon, Pa and uncle John, Ruthie and Winfield, Tom and the preacher. Noah stood on the ground looking up at the great load, of them sitting on top of the truck.* (***The Grapes***, P. 84)

Later in California, winter rain soon swell into a second Noah's flood, just as mentioned in the Bible, Genesis – *And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights* (7: 12).

The remnant of the Joad family shelter in an abandoned boxcar which stands in as the new Noah's Ark, and Pa Joad - like a second Noah - is able to stave off the rising water when Rose of Sharon goes into labour. Her child is born dead, however, and is put, Moses - like, into a basket which uncle John launches upon the flood waters. "Go down and tell 'em," (*The Grapes*, P. 459).

Exodus:

She got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. (2: 3).

As the waters begin to recede and spring approaches, the Joads leave their boxcar and shelter in an abandoned barn, the novel's equivalent of the stable at Bethlehem. Here a miraculous birth occurs. In the barn, the Joads meet a desperate boy whose

father is dying of starvation. Realizing that the man is unable to swallow food, Rose of Sharon breast feeds him⁽⁹⁾.

Not only Sharon's baby, but there is another Moses - type in the novel. Tom serves as a leader of the people as they journey toward the Promised Land. Like Moses, he has killed a man and had been away for a time before rejoining his people and becoming their leader. He has a younger brother just like Moses (Aaron - Al) who serves as an aid for the leader. This parallel ends before the completion of the story.

There could possibly be another Moses - like leader in the novel. Jim Casy's character could be symbolically tied into the Biblical hero of Moses, in the book of Exodus Moses guided thousands of people out of severe slavery and harsh treatment in Egypt. From there he led them to the Promised Land that flowed with milk and honey. Much is the same when looking at *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck could possibly be trying to infer the Joad family as being the struggling Exodus people. Casy acts as a leader who directs the Joads out of famine and hard times during the 1930's in Oklahoma and into California where they can begin a new life with hope of a better future.

A well-known sacrificial figure in history is Jesus Christ, a Biblical figure who gave his life for the salvation of mankind. In the novel, the embodiment of sacrifice is found in former preacher Jim Casy. Known as the Christ figure of the novel, he devotes much of his time fighting against the injustice that the families are experiencing in their job searches. Casy even holds a hidden clue in his name! the initials of Jim Casy are the same as those of Jesus Christ, Steinbeck implies that Pa Joad is symbolically a typical Christian who is struggling in a world of sin. The famine and difficult conditions of the great depression stand for the sin that is surrounding this battling Christian. As a result, this sinner turns to the lord for salvation and release from the sin. Jim Casy gives his guidance and direction as Pa Joad and his family takes in his advice. When he is saying grace in chapter 8, he compares himself to Jesus, "I been in the hills, thinking almost you might say like Jesus when into the wilderness to think His way out of troubles".(*The Grapes*, P. 70).

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During a quarrel with a labour recruiter and a deputy, Casy leaves himself to "take the blame", "they'll jus' put me in jail, an' I ain't doin' nothin' but sit around". (*The Grapes*, P. 363). He also attempts to organize under rapid migrant workers and fights for the rights of starving families;

*Casy stared blindly at the light. He breathed heavily. "Listen", he said. "You fell as don't know what you're doin'. You're he/pin' to starve kids". "Shut up, you red 0 son -of-a-bitch". A short heavy man stepped into the light. He carried a new white pick handle. Casy went on, "You don' know what you're a-doin'", The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crushed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone, and Casy fell sideways out of the light... The flashlight bean dropped, searched and found Casy's crushed head. (*The Grapes*, P. 527).*

This parallels the passion of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament, where he defends his purpose "that I should give testimony to the truth" found in John; (18: 37).

Towards the end of the novel, Steinbeck pulls out all the Biblical stops to imply this optimistic conclusion to his tragic story. Jim Casy, who combines elements of John the Baptist and Jesus, is killed by strike breakers, but his mantle descends on the Tom Joad, whose character combines elements of Jesus and Moses. When Casy is struck down, Tom kills his attacker⁽¹⁰⁾. One recalls how Jesus told his followers to put down their swords (Mathew 26: 52). Tom proclaims, "Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there". (*The Grapes*, P. 472).

Maternity creates the tendency for women to be more gentle and nurturing than males. "Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. She balanced on her toes now, for the

baby's sake. And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms of reproduction and of motherhood". (*The Grapes*, P. 130). A woman, pregnant or not, naturally tends to be a mother figure, and so her relations with other people reflects that mentality, "The adults moved toward the lighted kitchen through the deep dusk, and Ma served them greens and side - meat in time plates", (*The Grapes*, P. 141). Ma Joad serves her family before herself, making sure that they have nourishment.

Women can change roles with men, they can be sacrificial and the later can be nurturing. The sacrificial aspect is that of woman giving up her own comfort in order to bring a new life into the world, avoiding the pains of labour. The best Biblical example of a sacrificial female is Virgin Mary. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad displays a parallel between her and Virgin Mary through her strength and selflessness during Granma's death, she suffers the loss of Granma lonely so that the family would have no trouble crossing through to California.

Ma raised her eyes and looked over the valley. "Granma's dead". They looked at her, all of them, and Pa asked, "When?" "Before they stopped us las' night". "So that's why you didn't wan'em to look". "I was afraid we wouldn't get acrost", she saidThe family looked at Ma with a little terror at her strength Casy said in wonder, "All night, long, an' she was alone". And he said, "John, there's a woman so great with love.....". (*The Grapes*, P. 313).

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Another image of Mary in the novel is Rose if Sharon. From being young and immature, she develops into a maternal figure after the death of her child. She nurses a starting man back to health. Here, she abandons her pride and humble herself in order to provide nurture and sacrifice for the suffering man. She is a Christ - like figure, an individual that lives life not for the elevation of oneself but for the betterment of those around them, for the greater good.

3. Echoes of the Bible in *East of Eden*:

Religion constantly appears throughout Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. The story of Cain and Abel runs through many generations in the book. The novel is a bout a California family who struggle to overcome issue of betrayal, infidelity and the old battle between good and evil. This epic centers around two generations of brothers in the Trask family; Adam and Charles, and Adams sons Aron and Caleb. In each generation, one of the Trask brothers is moral and good ,while, the other brother behaves badly and immorally. Of course, the “ good “ Trask brothers are obviously favoured which develops envious tendencies that appear throughout the book.

In the Bible, Cain and Able are the sons of Adam and Eve, Cain owns a Farm while Able is a Keeper of sheep. They both present a gift to God, Cain offers the fruit of the ground, and Abel offers the firstlings of the flock, God then favours Abel's gift over cain's (Genesis: 4.5), Cain becomes angry and jealous towards Abel and he eventually kills him.

God is a ware of everything, even though he asks Cain about Abel which Cain replies “ Am I my brothers Keeper?” (Genesis: 4.9)

God banishes Cain to another part of the land and places a mark on him so that no man will kill him.

East of Eden is a reenactment of the Cain and Abel tale. Many similarities are seen between the two. The title of the novel comes from the biblical tale of the sons of Adam. The relationship between Abel and Cain who killed Abel, is similar to those of Adam and Charles, who once tried to kill Adam, and Aron And Caleb who also struggled together. Charles And Caleb fight for their fathers'

affections in the same way in which Cain fought with Abel over the Lord's attention . also in the novel, the Cain characters are identified by names beginning with "C" (Cyrus, Charles, Cathy, Caleb) and the Abel characters with "A" (Alice, Adam, Aron, Abra). Both Charles and Caleb are jealous of their respective siblings. Charles is envious of his brother Adam because he is the favorite of their father Cyrus, and Caleb's jealousy towards Aron is also due to the favoritism that Aron receives from their father Adam, However, the relationship between Caleb and Iron more closely imitates the storey of Cain and Abel because Caleb ultimately causes Aron's death. Although Caleb does not kill Aron with his own hand, he reveals damaging information about their mother's profession which causes Aron to run off and join the Army. Similarly, to God's questioning Cain about Abel, Adam asks Caleb about the where about of Aron. Like Cain, he untruthfully tells his father,

" How do I know.....

Am I Supposed to look after him? (*East of Eden*, p.262).¹¹Eventually, the family learns that Aron is killed in world war I.

Another relation between the novel and the Bible is the using of the Hebrew word " timshel" which is spoken to Cain By God, it means " is thou mayest". This word gives free will to mankind to commit good or evil acts. This word appears after in the novel and is important at the very end where Adam's final timshel blesses and forgives Caleb and reminds him that even after his murder of his brother he still has the chance to overcome the tendency for evil which he believes he has inherited from his mother. ⁽¹²⁾

According to the use of this word, Steinbeck reveals a truth that we are not condemned, we have a choice between good and evil. It is a very liberating concept, it gives man hope that every one is not corrupted, because they are descended from Adam and Eve. Timshel explains that everyone has a choice to be either good or evil. The major motifs of the novel are actually based on two independent thoughts. The first is about man is and how he lives his life. The second is the choice that man has between good and evil. Steinbeck's belief that evil is not passed from parent to child is illustrated by Kate (Cathy) and her sons. Aron and Caleb are

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obviously nothing like their mother in relation to good and evil. Aron, the Abel figure is not capable of his mother's wickedness and lack of morality. Caleb differs from his mother in that he is heterogeneously good and evil. Steinbeck presents that idea that man takes his own path and not necessarily the path of his bloodline.

One more connection between the novel and the Genesis story is the title that Steinbeck gives to the book. The words *East of Eden* are symbolic because they represent an additional parallel. In the Bible, Cain is banished by God "and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the East of Eden" (Genesis: 4.16). The allusion to the Bible is quite clear because of this particular passage. The Trask brothers are undoubtedly patterned after the biblical brothers and Steinbeck has masterfully recreated the ancient story.

4. Conclusion:

It is through the use of Biblical allusion and imagery that Steinbeck gives most of his novel a powerful message along with pure artistic genius. The central characters are based on religious archetypes. In *the Grapes of Wrath*, Jim Casy is commonly known as the Christ figure, Tom Joad is a less - apparent Christ figure, the stillborn child is a Moses reference, and there is the idea of the "Promised Land" a parallel to the Exodus in the Old Testament. In many ways, Christ could also be considered a Moses figure because of His leading His people to the "Promised Land". Other less popular, but equally significant, parallels are that of Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon as being the Madonna figures of the novel.

Through reference to religion, Steinbeck draws similarities between Cain and Abel and his own characters, putting a powerful impact in the final scene with the word *timshel*, and stresses the power of God over the existence of everyone.

Notes:

- 1- John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* Text and Criticism, Ed. Peter Lisca (New York; Penguin, 1972), P. 47.
- 2- www.steinbeck.sjsu.edu/home/index. p.3.
- 3- www.steinbeck.sjsu.edu/hoirie/index p.3.

- 4- Jackson Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck; A Biography*. (New York: Viking Publishers, 1984), p. 102.
- 5- John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. (New York: Penguin Book Ltd., 1972). This edition will be used for all the quotations from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Subsequent quotations will be followed by a page reference to this edition.
- 6- The Holy Bible, (International Bible Society, 1999). This edition will be used for all the quotations from the Bible. Subsequent quotations will be followed by a section reference to this edition.
- 7- Peter Lisca, "The Dynamics of Community in *The Grapes of Wrath in Twentieth Century Interpretation of the Grapes of Wrath*, ed.: Robert Con Davis, (Englewood, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, inc., 1982), p. 40.
- 8- Peter Lisca, *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth*. (New York: Crowell, 1978), P. 63.
- 9- [www.Rev.TylerA.Strand."GrapesandWrath".20Q5.p.2](http://www.Rev.TylerA.Strand.).
- 10- www.KeithWindschuttle.Steinbeck'smythoftheOkies.2005.p.3.
- 11- John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, (New York, penuin, 1952).
- 12- [www. Sibling Rivalry. Voices.yahoo.com](http://www.SiblingRivalry.Voices.yahoo.com).

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استعمال الإنجيل في روايات مختارة للكاتب

ستاينبك

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المستخلص

إن كثيراً من شخصيات رواية ستاينبك عناقيد الغضب وأحداثها، مرآة لشخصيات وأحداث تاريخية ودينية وأسطورية، وهذا أمر لم يحدث صدفة. فهناك بعض التلميحات الإنجيلية في عنوان الروايات نفسها، وهناك الكثير من التوازيات معه. ففي رواية عناقيد الغضب وشرق عدن مثلاً اسم جم كيسي يبدأ بحروف اسم المسيح عليه السلام. كما أنه يسافر مع اثني عشر شخصاً إلى كاليفورنيا برحلة تجارية الأمر يذكرنا برحلة موسى مع شعبه حينما خرجوا من مصر، وان للمسيح اثني عشر حوارياً. ويضحّي كيسي بحياته من أجل توم، ويتخلي عنها حياته لينقذ حياة الآخرين. وهناك توازيات أخرى مع توم ومريم العذراء. كما يوجد تلميح آخر لهجرة اليهود الأمر الذي يعكس ويوازي رحلة عائلة جود إلى كاليفورنيا.

أما رواية شرق عدن فهي أيضاً بدورها تحمل العديد من التلميحات الإنجيلية لأنها تطابق القصة التاريخية لأبناء آدم وحواء.