

Weakness in men in the grapes of wrath



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Sexual inequality can be traced throughout history. Since centuries ago the male populations have been perceived as the ones with less weakness and flaws, they were almost even deemed as superior. Kings were often regarded as the chosen ones over the queens, additionally, in many locations including Greece and early America only male could vote. In *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, male characters of the Joad family; Pa, a collapsed leader, Uncle John, a blameworthy shameful husband, and Grampa, an aged fragile progenitor, develops into dependent, vulnerable followers allowing the women in the fragile family to step up and take over.

Steinbeck utilizes this juxtaposition to demote men's supremacy and emphasis the equality between the two different sexes, moreover the equality of all human beings. During the 1930s in the United States, millions of families had to abandon their homes and migrate to California due to the cruel Dust Bowl era. The unforgiving Dust Bowl was a severe crisis; the top layer of the surface earth of the Missouri and Mississippi Valleys was loosened as a consequence of the drought, the stormy wind in the environment further deteriorated the condition. Life was a struggle in this harsh surrounding; in addition bankers were forcefully withdrawing the tenant farms, the homes of the powerless weak farmers. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the novel follows the specific Joad family, the main protagonists, throughout their harsh and strenuous road trip on Route 66.

In the opening of the novel, before the arduous journey Pa, from the Joad family begin with complete ascendancy and control. "...Course I cant say right now; Pa says all the men'll talk tonight and figger when we gonna start. I guess maybe we better not say till all the men come" (Steinbeck 127). As

the Joad family was forced out of their residence Pa, as one of the head of the family, plans the family's trip to California with care and consideration, as one of the most dominate, authoritative leaders in the family.

Nevertheless, loosing the farm seems to grasp a part of him away, and the adversity faced by the Joad family proves to be too heavy for him to carry. As the novel continues, the weaknesses in the male characters become more conspicuous. Steinbeck narrates the story of Uncle Joad, one of the males in the Joad family. In the past when his wife complains of stomach pain he stubbornly declines her request for a doctor, shortly after this lead to her death. Since then Uncle John has not been able to let go of the past. This “marked him with guilt and shame and had left an unbreaking loneliness on him”(Steinbeck 131).

Stuck in the past, Uncle John is unable to provide for the family instead the opposite is required in order for his survival. Grampa Joad loses his superior status early on in the novel, “...he no longer ruled. His position was honorary and matter of custom” (Steinbeck 137). He later on further breaks down, as the Joad family is about to leave for their trip to California. He refuses to leave ‘his land’, leading the rest of his family to put him to sleep with “soothin’ sirup’. Not far along the unforgiving drive the Joad family makes their first stop to camp at, there they meet the Wilsons.

As the family gets out of the jalopy, “without earning Grampa began to cry, his chin wavered and his old lips tightened over his mouth and he sobbed hoarsely...” and Uncle John said, “...he ain’t never done that before. Never seen him blubberin’ in my life.” (Steinbeck 185). Soon after as Grampa rests

in the Wilson's tent, he pasts away, and is buried in a hole dug by his family. Grampa's weakness caused him to give up hope leading to his tragic death on unfamiliar external earth.

He past away because of the lost connection between him and his land, meaning that he died spiritually first As the road trip continues, Pa soon loses his authoritative stance due to his lack of abilities. As them family encounter difficult conflicts, he begins to relinquish his character as leader to Ma. The major scene of this turning point is when the Wilson's car breaks down leading to the possible split up of the unstable Joad family. Malcontent about this Ma stands up to protest against Pa. " The while group watched the revolt...And Pa's anger did not rise, and his hands hung limply at his sides. And in a moment the group knew that Ma had won.

And Ma knew it too"(Steinbeck231). At this significant point on in the novel, Pa is no long productive, and looses the ability to supply the family in the conventional sense. In the novel, Pa represents the theme of the loss of human dignity due to his weakness, the incapability to adapt. Unlike the three vulnerable males Ma, one of the most development characters, confiscates Pa's influence and dominance as the nucleus-like center of the family. .

With this new force, Ma ' forces the men to accede to the human needs of the family' (Cederstorm). Unfortunately, " she loses faith as she sees her family falling apart...however...she knows the importance of the whole including the family unit and the larger human family" (Hinds 80). Nonetheless, Ma still carries out the duty as the head of the family,

attempting to maintain the fragile family together as a whole In *The Grapes of Wrath* gender relations are extremely tense. Steinbeck portrays that women get stronger while moving, but men start a process of weakness. This is because the land is where the men get their strength, Ma Joad gets this from the union of the family. Ma has the skills that Pa, Uncle John, and Grampa does not, she is able to adapt to the new alien environment and persist.

Steinbeck utilizes this juxtaposition of Pa, Uncle John, and Grampa against Ma, in order to prove the equality of both sexes. Both male and females are needed to overcome obstacles and maintain balance in life. In conclusion, throughout the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* John Steinbeck attempts to shatter the traditional thoughts of inequality between the male and female population. By using the juxtaposition from the novel in which fragile weak and flawed males abound; Pa, Uncle John, and Grampa, against the dominate, authoritative, and independent Ma. Throughout the novel as the males fall apart like their dusty farms, Ma tries her best to guide the Joad family back into the conventional safe home, proving women's strength through rough times.