

The grapes of wrath critical lens essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



It is perceived throughout literature that characters within a novel are solely prompted by personal interests. Yet, we learn that they are sometimes driven throughout the work ascertaining a purpose larger than themselves. Whether it is an author's use of literary elements (such as dialogue, characterization, or conflict) or even in their craft alone, it is inevitable in the two classic works: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, we discover an unavoidable change in the character Rose of Sharon. When we are first introduced to Rose of Sharon, she is exceedingly dependent on her husband and primarily concerned about the well-being of her child. Yet as the novel progresses, Steinbeck innovates Rose of Sharon into a seemingly new character. This is also present with *The Crucible's* John Proctor. He begins absent-minded, careless, and only uneasy about keeping his affairs with Abigail Williams silent. However, Arthur Miller worked to evolve Proctor's character with his use of conflict, irony, and a creative mind-set.

Both characters, Rose of Sharon and John Proctor, progress into nearly entirely new people all from the endeavor of the authors. The focus though, is how the authors are able to do it. While reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, readers surely immerse themselves into the novel and are easily captivated by Steinbeck's immense details and enthralling plot line. We follow the Joad family as they travel cross-country during the Great Depression, and we learn about each of the characters individually. Rose of Sharon, for example, is first brought up at an early stage of her pregnancy. She had high hopes and aspirations for her family-to-be. It could have been recognized as though her wants were only for her personal interests, yet she was childbearing and

had inescapable heartfelt dreams she couldn't be reprimanded for. Although there weren't many materialistic riches for the Joads, Rose of Sharon's richness in heart clearly shows.

Steinbeck works with many literary elements to expose Rose of Sharon's growth. One literary element in particular includes bildungsroman, or a coming-of-age element. With this, one of the protagonists comes to learn a common understanding through experience. Whether it be ignorance to knowledge or idealism to realism, (which play into Rose of Sharon's character change) Steinbeck exemplifies this element in his work. Steinbeck molds the plot so intricately to ensure Rose of Sharon's experiences change her for the better. We see in Chapter 30 that Rose of Sharon's due date had arrived and, " Rose of Sharon has lost her restraint. She screamed fiercely under the fierce pains." (Steinbeck 441) The act of childbirth is life-altering enough as is, yet Steinbeck approached the situation with a twist. We later on learn that Rose of Sharon had birthed an already dead child when, " On a newspaper lay a blue shriveled little mummy." (Steinbeck 444) The child that Rose of Sharon had adored for months, the one she envisioned her sanguine future with, had entered the world already dead. That experience alone is shattering.

Readers then apprehend that the Rose of Sharon we began with wouldn't have been able to handle the incident. Steinbeck had molded Rose of Sharon's character into the shining image of her mother. Steinbeck made the decision to strip Rose of Sharon from her home, from the needed nutrition for her child, from her beloved husband whom abandon her. She had grown

from the traumatizing events Steinbeck had crafted so well, and there's evidence of exactly that at the ending of the novel where, " her lips came together and smiled mysteriously." (Steinbeck 455) That idyllic smile of hers was symbolic of hope and subliminal that she had grown to be just like Ma Joad. Steinbeck was able to show his readers that " characters may evolve through a work as persons assuming a larger sense of purpose." In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, readers are directly submerged in the middle of a debacle.

There's an immediate tension that Miller crafts as he manipulates scenes by showing us that his characters are entirely self-centered. Miller does well in using the literary element of setting to capture the mood of his play. With life in Massachusetts in 1692 being tough and almost grievous, women's lives were tedious and the introduction of Tituba was captivating, alluring, and exotic for the girls. Miller establishes a common understanding that the town of Salem was sick when he gathers the townspeople to bicker. It's impossible to get along with the dysfunction Miller presents. Even when cousin Betty is bedridden and thoughts of sorcery are mentioned, some of the townspeople couldn't even be bothered at the start of it. John Proctor, especially, had no interest, no desire to involve himself with witchcraft at the commence of the novel. Readers knew him as a cheater, a liar, and slightly egotistic. His mind was purely set on gaining trust from his wife and ridding himself of past ties with Abigail Williams, and if not those primary concerns he was indifferent.

Miller worked with Abigail's character with the use of characterization to affirm that readers could understand the extents that she would go to have

John Proctor be her lover. And as the play progressed and Elizabeth, John's wife, was accused, Proctor began to unfold. The use of conflict afflicted Proctor, bringing him problematic issues which further changed him into an honest man. With all the effort John Proctor put into saving his wife, his personality changed. Proctor was forced to make a decision to save himself and confess to witchcraft or save his honor and die not discrediting others. We witness that Miller finally allows Proctor to earn his dignity as he refuses to sign his confession crying out, " You will not use me!" (Miller 142)

He then goes on to explain, " I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor...Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it." (Miller 144) John Proctor gave meaning to that timeless phrase " Go out with a bang," as his memorable actions changed the court and the view on witchcraft. Yet, it wouldn't have been achieved if it weren't for Arthur Miller's competence in which his characters were provoked to deem a larger sense of purpose. All in all, these two literary works convey the clear idea that characters assuming a larger sense of purpose may arise throughout the piece in contrast to solely being driven by a personal interest. Whether it be Rose of Sharon and John Proctor, literature presents many characters akin to this concept repeatedly. It's merely a matter of how the author channels the idea across, which Steinbeck and Miller have achieved phenomenally.