

John Steinbeck's grapes of wrath



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Burkhead, Cynthia. Student Companion to John Steinbeck. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002 Cynthia Burkhead's book is a comprehensive discussion of John Steinbeck and some of his more well-known writings. The book begins with a brief description of Steinbeck's career as a writer and his contributions to the literary world. The following chapters provide in-depth reviews of Steinbeck's popular novels, such as *Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Pearl*, *East of Eden*, among others. One chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the *Grapes of Wrath*.

Burkhead provides a very good background to the circumstances prior to the writing of the novel, primarily with regards to Steinbeck's earlier attempts to draw attention to the plight of migrant workers in California. Overall, the book is highly useful in this study due to its holistic review of the novel. Beyond the usual review, Burkhead provides greater understanding of the rationale behind the *Grapes of Wrath* through her inclusion of the process and events that led to its completion.

Burkhead takes note of the social conditions of the period as well as Steinbeck's personal crusade to assist the migrant workers in order to present a more graphic portrayal of the reality behind the fiction. The data from the book was very useful in analyzing the social significance and the central theme of the novel. The discussion of the socio-economic conditions of the Great Depression lend credence and "soul" to *The Grapes of Wrath*. Most important of all, it presents a different approach to the study of the novels of Steinbeck.

Rather than simply focus on the stories in the novels, the book presents a correlation between Steinbeck as a man (his personal life and advocacies) and his output as a writer. In a sense, the book shows the character of Steinbeck and how this has influenced his writing. It provides a relational presentation of the writer and his novel, thus significantly assisting this study in its review of Steinbeck and the Grapes of Wrath. The study utilized much of this source to present an overall view of Steinbeck's motivations as a writer and the eventual result of his experiences culminating in the novel.

Cassuto, David. Turning Wine into Water: Water as a Privileged Signifier in 'The Grapes of Wrath'. " Papers on Language and Literature, 29. 1(1993): 67

The article notes the symbolism of water in Grapes of Wrath. Though the central symbolism in this article was not included in this study, the source remained useful because of the way it contrasted America's wealthy past with the drought and disasters that ravished the 1930s. Cassuto not only looks into the symbolisms found in the novel, he also discussed Steinbeck's mourning tone in discussing the passing of time and the death of values and norms that communities held dear prior to the Great Depression.

Though it is centrally focused on water as a symbol, the article actually provides good analysis of the migrant situation and is thus still a useful source. Since the central thought of the article was not utilized, it would seem as if the article is merely a source of additional information. It is more important to note, however, that it was the key concepts in this article: the significance of wrath and the oneness of the oppressed. That provided the study with its initial concept of the central themes of the novel.

It was this article that sent the study towards a particular path, especially in terms of how these central themes are developed in the novel. Hinton, Rebecca. "Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath'." *The Explicator*, 56. 2(1998): 101. Hinton's article discusses the central theme of the novel, which is the oneness of all who suffer. The article points out that in Steinbeck's novel, the only way to survive and defeat oppression is to be generous. Though one may have little in life, sharing is always a good act.

In essence, Hinton presents her own idea of the central theme, contrasting the actions of the elite farmers with the altruism of the migrant workers. Moreover, Hinton provides a comparison of the characters at the beginning and at the end of the novel. A useful presentation of each character's growth (or lack of it) shows the transformation that they had undergone after the journey to California. Unlike the other sources, this article is focused mainly on the theme. Given its brevity, the straightforwardness with which the article addresses its issues is most welcome.

This article is considerably reliable and useful to the study. Though much of it is Hinton's own understanding of the novel, she does present compelling evidence to support her theories. This makes the article highly useful to the study. Its depiction of the oppressed and their need to band together captures the central theme of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. The evidence presented led to a review of other sources that discussed the themes of the novel in complete detail as well. Though short, the article is memorable in that it presents a central theme that would later be adapted by the study.

In fact, it provides the central evidence to support the study's assertion that the characters such as Tom and Rose of Sharon are transformed by the difficulties they met following their journey to California. Though the study does not, of course, quote the article word for word, it did serve as a significant source of ideas and concepts regarding the presentation and central theme to be found in *Grapes of Wrath*. It can be considered one of the central sources utilized in this study. Johnson, Claudia Durst.

Understanding the Grapes of Wrath: A Student Casebook to Issues,

Sources and Historical Documents, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999

Unlike the other sources, Johnson's book is less of a literary analysis than a discussion of the social conditions of the country during the 1930s. The book, at first, seems rather similar to the one by Cynthia Burkhead. Upon reading it, however, one realizes its significance as a source for this study as well.

Whereas Burkhead's was, in essence, a discussion of Steinbeck and his novels, Johnson focuses on the concepts and issues raised by *Grapes of Wrath*.

Much detail is given to the infamous struggle between the elite farmers of California and the migrant workers. Without becoming a recitation of facts, Johnson's book provides pertinent details that bring life to the events in the novel. Some key issues discussed by Johnson are the economic situation of the 1930s, the case of the migrant laborers and the lawlessness of the period. These issues are then related to the events in Steinbeck's novel, thereby presenting a real-world aspect to the fictional novel.

The book is significant to this study primarily because of its ability to draw parallels between the events of the period and the events in the novel. It lends credence to the novel and also provides greater insight on the character of Steinbeck as a crusader for the plight of the migrant workers. It is, in effect, a holistic presentation of the reality behind the fiction in *Grapes of Wrath*. Shillinglaw, Susan. "California Answers the Grapes of Wrath". *The Critical Response to John Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath*. Ed. Barbara Heavilin.

Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. 183-200 The California elite - composed mostly of large company farmers - chafed greatly at Steinbeck's accusations. They saw the migrants as trouble for the state and were less than happy with the novel's insinuations that they had been taking advantage of the poor's by exploiting them for cheap labor. Shillinglaw provides a discussion of the four attempts that appeared after the publication of the novel; all four sought to discredit Steinbeck's depiction of life in a California plantation.

The defense came from several different camps: farmer, crusader, novelist. All these rebuttals to Steinbeck's novel, however, are eventually discredited by Shillinglaw. The book acknowledges the determination of these detractors in discrediting Steinbeck. However, it also brings to light the discrepancies in these defensive books and articles, noting how the defense largely tries to negate completely Steinbeck's depiction of the life of the migrant.

The result is a balanced and unbiased review of the positive and negative points raised by Steinbeck's novel, primarily in terms of accuracy and

faithfulness to the conditions of the period. The book is a different angle of looking at *Grapes of Wrath*, as it provides a more in-depth look at the credibility and social relevance of Steinbeck's controversial novel. The article does not completely side with Steinbeck; in fact, it looks into the rationale behind the spirited defense and tries to present a balanced discussion of the social relevance of Steinbeck's novel and how it affected the lives of the sharecroppers.

The result is a historical approach to the formation of the novel, its motivations and the response of critics to it. Since *Grapes of Wrath* is one of the most controversial novels of Steinbeck, it is but right to have the study look into the social implications of its publication. The article provided a different and fresh understanding of the situation during the period and lends credence to Steinbeck's portrayal of the migrant workers.