

Explain how John Steinbeck promotes agonistic and secular humanism and give an example...



Explain how John Steinbeck promotes agonistic and secular humanism and give examples in The Grapes of Wrath. John Steinbeck's works of fiction, including the epic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, are full of concern for poor people. In the novel, a poor family from Oklahoma leave their home and move westwards in search of employment. Set in the backdrop of the Great Depression (one of the tumultuous periods in American history), the story follows their journey west and the inevitability of suffering, disappointment and disillusionment of their lot. Even when the Joad family reaches the promised land of California, where farming work is said to be in abundance, the overflow of other immigrants like them skews the power between the worker and the master. As a result the wages are pulled down and many go unemployed. Those who are lucky enough to be hired are exploited thoroughly. Although the novel is an indictment against the fallacy of capitalist utopia, it does not gravitate toward a Marxist position. To the extent that Steinbeck accepts bitter realities of life in the United States without resorting to political and economic ideologies is evidence for the agonist in the author. Moreover, by showcasing virtue and resilience in the face of adversity, Steinbeck hints at poverty's noble connotations, which resonates with the message of the Holy Bible. Strengthening the case for the novel's biblical inspirations, the name of one of the Joad family members is Rose of Sharon. But it would be simplistic to classify *The Grapes of Wrath* as a Christian novel, for it deals with universal human concerns and universal avenues for salvation. Steinbeck makes it clear that such salvation is not an event in afterlife, but one accessible during the course of life itself. The last scene of the story, where Rose of Sharon, upon seeing the miserable starvation of an old man, offers him her breast milk (which her stillborn baby

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could not have). This act epitomizes the secular humanistic basis of the novel. Work Cited: Steinbeck, John, *The Grapes of Wrath*, first published in 1939 by The Viking Press-James Lloyd