

Grapes of wrath – jim casy chracter analysis



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Grapes of Wrath - Jim Casy Chracter Analysis

John Steinbeck passionately describes a time of unfair poverty, unity, and the human spirit in the classic, *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel tells of real, diverse characters who experience growth through turmoil and hardship. Jim Casy- a personal favorite character- is an ex-preacher that meets up with a former worshiper, Tom Joad. Casy continues a relationship with Tom and the rest of the Joads as they embark on a journey to California in the hopes of prosperity and possibly excess. Casy represents how the many situations in life impact the ever-changing souls of human- beings and the search within to discover one's true identity and beliefs. Casy, however, was much more complex than the average individual. His unprejudiced, unified, Christ-like existence twists and turns with every mental and extraneous disaccord.

Jim Casy is an interesting, complicated man. He can be seen as a modern day Christ figure, except without the tending manifest belief in the Christian faith. The initials of his name, J. C., are the same as Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus was exalted by many for what he stood for was supposed to be , Casy was hailed and respected by many for simply being a preacher. Casy and Jesus both saw a common goodness in the average man and saw every person as holy. Both Christ and Casy faced struggles between their ideals versus the real world. (Despite Casy's honesty, goodness, and loyalty to all men, he would not earn a meal or warm place to stay. Although Jesus had many followers, still others opposed his preaching until the very end.) These prophets attempted to disengage man from the cares of the world and create a high spiritualism that stemmed joy from misery. (All the migrants found pleasures along their trips and kept their hope and spirit throughout the journey. Thanks to Jesus, the saddest, dullest existence has had its

glimpse of heaven.) Casy once remarked, " I gotta see them folks that's gone out on the road. I gotta feelin' I got to see them. They gonna need help no preachin' can give 'em. Hope of heaven when their lives ain't lived? Holy Sperit when their own sperit is downcast an' sad?" Casy wished to reach out to others in spite of his own troubles. He wanted to give them sprit, hope and rejuvenate their souls. Jesus too felt that need and can be considered " the great consoler of life." The Life of Jesus by Ernest Renan tells of Pure Ebionism, which is the doctrine that the poor alone shall be saved and the reign of the poor is approaching. This secures a definite parallel to Jesus Christ and not only Jim Casy, but the entire book, The Grapes of Wrath. The rich people, banks, owners, and institutions have taken control of the country and nature, but as the book says, " And the association of owners knew that some day the praying would stop. And there's an end." This means that these people will always carry on, one day they will take action, there will be a fight, and quite possibly an end to the misfortune and a reign of prevailing prosperity. Christ once said, " When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not... thy rich neighbors... But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed." John Steinbeck and Jim Casy along with many other migrants believe in charity, helping others and an end to the insatiable appetite for money and self-indulgence. When Casy is saying grace in chapter eight, he compares himself to Jesus: " I been in the hills, thinkin', almost you might say like Jesus wen into the wilderness to think His way out of troubles." Casy was beginning to feel confused, troubled and stressful about his faith, but when he went into the wilderness and rediscovered nature, he was a new man with a new-found faith.

(Eventually Christ was no longer a Jew and strayed from the traditional

Hebrew idea of God. Casy's beliefs did not precisely follow Christianity.) Like Christ, Casy was jailed and later aroused the antagonism of the people in authority and was brutally slain. He died, like Christ saying to his crucifiers, "You don' know what you're a-doin." Jim Casy was similar to Jesus Christ but his personality traits did not end there.

Jim Casy's personality is one of the most unprovincial, nonjudgemental in the world. He believed that every one is created equal no matter what their physical differences, political class, or position in the world might be. He shows this by never uttering a hurtful word at anyone, sacrificing his own welfare to picket and raise the wages of other workers, and not faltering when he or his groupmates were called derogatory names. Jim Casy was forever grateful to the Joads for travelling with him and talked of going off by himself to pay them back several times. He once said, " I wanna do what's bes' for you folks. You took me in, carried me along. I'll do whatever." Casy never asked for money while he was preaching because he knew the position his listeners were in, even though he was also desperate for money. Casy said in chapter four, " I brang Jesus to your folks for a long time, an' I never took up a collection nor nothin' but a bite to eat." Since Casy believes that we all have a small part of a larger soul, and everybody is holy, we are therefor equal. As Tom said, " one time he went out in the wilderness to find his soul, an' he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul." Once and for all stating equality, and universal holiness.

Casy is also a harmonious man. He believes in unity and that because people are all part of something greater than themselves, we should help one

another out, and work together because otherwise we are all lost. " Why do we got to hang it all on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love: maybe that's the Holy Sperit- the human sperit- the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of." He thinks that people working in cooperation is holy: " When they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fell, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang -- that's right, that's holy"(pg 71). Tom once said Casy recited to him Ecclesiastes 4: " Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken". Tom Joad also said, " maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one. ... I'll be ever'wherewherever you look." Casy was a Christ-like, unprovincial, and harmonious man albeit he still had personal conflicts.

Although Jim Casy has always seemingly been a man of God and Jesus, he battles with his faith throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*. He feels like he is contending with the very ideals he has spread to others- traditional ideals of God and Jesus. Casy started to question his own beliefs and what was said in the Bible. Casy lost many hours of sleep just thinking about this, and went through many days without even speaking. He began to have doubts about God, Jesus, and about the afterlife altogether. He went from a man of God to a man of everyone. Casy once said," An I says, 'Don't you love Jesus?' Well, I

thought an' thought an' finally I says, 'No, I don't know nobody name' Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people.' " After Casy challenged his inner belief of God and Jesus, he began to openly accept and tolerate unorthodox behavior. In fact some of Casy's new beliefs not only questioned the basic belief in God and Jesus, but also the content of the Bible and what a regular preacher (or ex-preacher) would say or do. Casy felt you should not judge anyone but yourself, where as the Bible openly condemns certain situations, labels, sexual orient, behavior, and practices. Casy believes you should do what you feel and doesn't believe in right or wrong. Casy once said, " I didn' even know it when I was preachin', but I was doin' some consid'able tom-cattin' around." He told of times when he lacked responsibility, filled girls up with the Holy Spirit by his preachings and then continually took them out with him to " lay in the grass." He once said, " There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say." A hedonistic moral code that tells of pleasure before rules and presumes to deny punishment is highly unusual for a one-time preacher. Casy struggled with his personal inner faith, and also his actions and speeches that defied what a regular man of the faith would do.

The inner being of Jim Casy was evolving and furthermore conflicting when he metamorphisized from a man of thought to a man of action. Towards the beginning of the book, Casy spent many a night sleep- deprived and many a day mute philosophizing to himself. " Say, Casy, you been awful goddamn quiet the las' few days... you ain't said ten words the las' couple days, " Tom said. Even Casy himself had trouble speaking at all: " Now look, Tom. Oh

what the hell! So goddamn hard to say anything." He remarked early on in the book, " There's stuff goin' on an' they's folks doin' things... An' if ya listen, you'll hear... res'lessness. They's stuff goin' on that these folks is doin' that don't know nothin' about- yet. They's gonna come somepin outa all these folks goin' wes'... They's gonna come a thing that's gonna change the whole country." Later in the book Casy stops predicting " a thing" and takes part of this revolution by striking outside a peach-picking plant. He had spent a lot of time pondering the environment at hand, but he finally turns his anti-authority feelings into physical actions when he kicks a cop causing trouble in Hooverville. Casy later goes on to spontaneously take the blame for the fight and was sent to jail, sacrificing his own well-being for others. On top of Casy's struggles with himself, he also faced exterior conflicts with the rest of the world.

Jim Casy came across conflicts between himself and the rest of society. He attempted to organize the migrants but saw great difficulty. After Casy was let out of jail he (and other wise men) picketed outside a peach-picking camp for higher wages. Although he managed to organize those few men, and kept the wages at a reasonable price while on strike, he could not persuade the others inside the workplace to join him. " Tell 'em the people who are picking peaches they're starvin' us an' stabbin' theirselves in the back. 'Cause sure as cowflops she'll drop to two an' a half jus' as soon as they clear us out," Casy said referring to the fact that unless the people in the camp did something- like went on strike- they would 'stab themselves in the back' because the wages would go back down. However, the people in the camp

only cared about the five they were making at the time and nothing else. Casy's attempts at organizing failed not only because the people cared specifically for what was happening at the present time, but also because they were afraid to organize. As soon as there is a recognized leader cops throw him in jail or threaten him. People put the migrants down and used derogatory terms to attempt to control them. Society wanted to keep the migrants moving, leaving it impossible for them to organize. There was once a man who started to unite the people in jail. Later the very people he was trying to help threw him out, afraid of being seen in his company. His attempts at uniting fail eternally when he tells a cop he is starving children and the cop smashes his skull with a board.

Jim Casy encounters more external difficulties when he crosses paths with cops. In chapter 20, Floyd, John, Tom and Casy have a physical fight with a deputy. In an unrelated incident, an officer threatened to set fire to the camp Casy's friends were staying at. When Casy was trying to organize some men, cops were continually breaking them down. " We tried to camp together, an' they cops druv us like pigs. Scattered us. Beat the hell outa fellas. Druv us like pigs... We can't las' much longer. Some people ain't et for two days," said Casy. " Cops cause more trouble than they stop," Casy also mentioned. Thus is a man who has seen animosity and enmity and has not been afraid.

In conclusion, Jim Casy is a rather Christ-like, harmonious, unprovincial, somewhat realistic character who has seen the challenges of organization, authority, his own faith, reception from others, and his own ever- changing personality. This man can be looked at as a martyr, ethical, sacred

individual, and yet ironically " Okie", hobo, or virtue-less bum. However The Grapes of Wrath and Jim Casy are undisputed symbols of hope, dreams, spirit and the oneness of all humanity. To me personally, Jim Casy is a role-model to any one who aspires to think original thoughts. I find his defiance of organized religion thought-provoking and inspiring. His ideas of nature are prophetic and his selfless love of people beautiful. Jim Casy's essence of understanding, dreams, love, hope and belief in an almighty holiness can be summed up in one quote, " An' Almighty God never raised no wages. These here folks want to live decent and bring up their kids decent. An' when they're old they wanta set in the door an' watch the downing sun. An' when they're young they wanta dance an' sing an' lay together. They wanta eat an' get drunk and work. An' that's it- they wanta jus' fling their goddamn muscles aroun' an' get tired."