

Grapes of wrath analysis essay



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Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* offers many windows on real life in Midwest America in the 1930s. But it also offers a powerful social commentary, both directly in structure and indirectly in characters.

Typical of very many, the Joads are driven off the land by far away banks and set out on a journey to California to find a better life. However the journey tears the family apart. Their dreams of fortune and prosperity are reduced to the simple desire to stay a family. California promised to be the land of milk and honey but unfortunately turns to sour grapes.

In the same way, the hopes and dreams of a generation turned to wrath and resentment. Steinbeck affords an open ground of this catastrophe for public examination by use of language and structure. The novel is harshly realistic. With the Joads as they travel, we meet the dark underside of capitalism with its forsaken poverty, its inhuman greed and the dehumanization of the individual, and sense a compromised trust between government and people. The truth of the journey contains wounded characters: the despairing Muley Graves, the strange Noah and the obsessed Uncle John, a one-eyed man filled with self-pity, the typical Mae serving in a Highway 66 cafe and the hell-bent vigilantes and deputies. This realism reaches a strange, even melodramatic nadir in the final scene of the novel.

Such social realism crafts a point: to illustrate the depth of poverty and exploitation Americans were suffering. To structure the novel as a journey has many advantages. Not only do characters develop but the settings change too; New views are portrayed with every different settings and so can gain a more comprehensive view of the impact of economic forces on

the travelers. The reader moves with the Joads from place to place and scene to scene observing their nationwide effects and building a general picture of the fraying nation. The journey structure also serves point of view: what the Joads experience, we experience.

They meet good and bad, rumors and certainties, as well as desert and lush valleys. The journey gives the reader various principles as sub-plots to complement the main thesis. The theme of puzzlement and despair is shadowed in dialogue; when the fat man near Paden (135) says: “ Well I don’t know what the country’s comin’ to”, he represents an entire nation of similar fears and thoughts. The Grapes of Wrath dramatizes that fury of the evicted. With strong Biblical overtones, Steinbeck’s rather strident and earnest tone projects his rather social philosophy.

Steinbeck demonstrates that the path to justice and serenity is rough and never sure; that life is filled with trials and troubles but in the end the wrath of a dislocated people will win God’s justice at the time of final judgment, when justice is most important.