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# 圣经的象征与隐喻

## ——斯坦贝克小说中主题表达的媒介

### 内容提要

斯坦贝克的小说总的看来有个共同点,那就是对圣经的象征与隐喻的普遍使用。该论文意在讨论与认可斯坦贝克在他多部主要作品中艺术性地使用圣经的象征与隐喻作为表达主题的媒介,帮助读者提高对这些作品所包含的主题的理解,激发他们对人性的想象力,为他们揭示斯坦贝克对人性的看法。

**关键词:** 约翰·斯坦贝克, 圣经的象征, 基督的隐喻

## 中文摘要

作为诺贝尔文学奖的获得者，斯坦贝克受到了评论界及广大读者的好评。在近 30 年的时间里，他完成了 16 部小说。这些作品以容括了广泛的主题、人物、故事题材和写作技巧著称，体现了斯坦贝克的多才多艺。

他的这些作品自然而然会有些共同点。其中值得评论界关注与称道的一点就是他在他的一些主要作品中大量使用了圣经的象征与隐喻。（即使只是随意的翻阅，读者也很容易发现斯坦贝克的作品里充满了出自圣经典故的一些简单又引人联想的代表性人物。他还常使用基督教或新基督教的很多思想贯穿他的作品。这种一体化的写作技巧不仅在文体上有助情节的构成与人物的发展，提高了作品的美感，而且更重要的是它为斯坦贝克大部分作品及其人物的行为奠定了主题基础。

该论文集集中于斯坦贝克作品中圣经主题较为明显的四部：《愤怒的葡萄》、《伊甸园之东》、《未决之战》、《人与鼠》，意在讨论与认可斯坦贝克在很多方面对圣经及其象征与隐喻的文学性使用和艺术技巧，比如作品的题目，人物的命名，小说的结构及事件等等，以更好地理解他的小说的主题和结构，激发读者对人性的想象力，为读者揭示斯坦贝克对人性的看法。

在导言部分，该论文总的介绍斯坦贝克的生平、写作生涯、其作品的特点，以及该论文的中心。

论文的主体则由四个章节组成。

第一章集中于《愤怒的葡萄》中与圣经相关的象征与隐喻，解释了该作品标题的象征意义与其结构和散文风格同圣经的相似性，探讨了约德一家与以色列人，凯西与救世主，汤姆与摩西和耶稣之间的相同点。通过一系列多样深刻的圣经象征与隐喻，这部小说赋予了其社会寓意以宗教的热诚和认可。

第二章围绕《伊甸园之东》的寓言框架展开，阐明了该作品对圣经中该隐和亚伯典故的一些重要隐喻，表现在作品的标题，主要人物的命名，以及人物的发展等方面。在这部明显具有象征意义的作品里，斯坦贝克传达了这样的寓意：每个人都有在美好与邪恶之间作出选择的能力。

第三章分为两部分，分别分析《人与鼠》和《未决之战》中圣经的象征与隐喻。第一部分指出，斯坦贝克通过乔治失去列尼一事确认了这样的主题：人是注定要生活在孤独中的；这一主题可以溶入另一个更大的寓言性主题，那就是：这一故事事实上是上帝对该隐的诅咒与惩罚的履行。而第二部分通过举例说明《未决之战》与史诗《失乐园》的相似点以及其他明显表明吉姆和救世主之间的联系性的细节，来说明这部小说的圣经主题。

最后一章为结论，对整篇论文进行了概括总结，并再次肯定了斯坦贝克尤其是在其作品中使用圣经象征与隐喻上所体现的艺术成就。

# **Biblical Symbolism and Allusions**

## **----A Vehicle of Themes of Steinbeck's Fiction**

### **Abstract**

Taking Steinbeck's fiction as a whole, we can find Biblical symbolism and allusions common. This thesis is to discuss and recognize Steinbeck's artistic use of Biblical symbolism and allusions as a vehicle of themes in many of his major works, so as to enhance the understanding of the themes they contain and to help gain his imaginative insights for and disclose his view of human nature to the reader.

**Key Words:** John Steinbeck, Biblical symbolism,  
Christian allusions

## Synopsis

A Nobel Prize laureate, Steinbeck has won both critical and popular acclaim. Over a period of almost thirty years he had written sixteen novels, which are marked by versatility and an impressively broad range of themes, techniques, characters and plots.

There are certainly some common things in his writing. One of them that deserves critical attention and acclaim is the use of Biblical symbolism and allusions he employed in many of his major works. Even a random skim will reveal that Steinbeck's works are penetrated with simple, evocative, and representative figures or symbols from Biblical patterns, and throughout his works he considered a wide range of Christian or neo-Christian ideas, which he often used to universalize his works. Stylistically, this integrative technique helps shape the plots and character development in his works, and functions for aesthetic enhancement. Above all, it serves as a thematic foundation for most of his works and the actions of the characters.

This thesis focuses on the four long novels in which the Christian themes are most evident: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*, *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*. It is meant to discuss and recognize Steinbeck's literary use of the Scriptures and his careful artistic crafting of Biblical allusions and symbolism in many aspects, such as the titles, the characters' names, the structure and events, so as to better understand the major themes and structures of his fictions and to help gain his imaginative insights for and disclose Steinbeck's view of human nature to the reader.

The thesis begins with Introduction, introducing generally Steinbeck's life, his writing career, the characteristics of his works, and the focus of the thesis.

And the body consists of four chapters.

Chapter One concentrates on the Biblical symbolism and allusions employed in *The Grapes of Wrath*, expounding the symbolic meaning of the novel's title and the similarity its prose style and structure bear to those of the Bible, exploring the parallels between the Joads and Israelites, Casy and Christ, Tom and Moses and Jesus. Through the abundance, diversity, and intensity of its Biblical symbolism and allusions the novel imbues its social message with a religious fervor and sanction.

Chapter Two develops around the allegorical framework of *East of Eden*, illuminating its crucial allusions to the Biblical Cain-Abel story exemplified in the title, the naming of the principal characters, and the character development. In this deliberately symbolic work, Steinbeck conveyed the message: every man has the power to choose between good and evil.

And the Chapter Three is composed of two parts, with each one analyzing respectively *Of Mice and Men* and *In Dubious Battle*. As for *Of Mice and Men*, the chapter points out that the theme of the individual's destiny to live in isolation that Steinbeck confirms through George's loss of Lennie, can be brought into a larger theme, an allegorical one, that is, the story is the fulfillment of the Lord's curse on Cain. While in Part Two, the Christian theme in *In Dubious Battle* is demonstrated through illustrating many specific parallels between the novel and its epic counterpart *Paradise Lost*, and other striking details that indicate the Jim-Christ relationship.

The last chapter is conclusion, which summarizes the thesis, and again acknowledges Steinbeck's aesthetic achievements particularly in using the Biblical symbolism and allusions in his works.

## Introduction

A Nobel Prize laureate and popular novelist, Steinbeck is considered among the most significant American novelists of the twentieth century, especially for his poignant depiction of socioeconomic conditions and human realities in the American West during the 1930s. He described the struggles of the migrant workers, celebrates their labor and shows the downtrodden overcoming their many adversities through courage and dignity, and through their compassion for fellow sufferers. When he was honored in 1962 with the Nobel Prize for Literature, the awards committee cites Steinbeck's "sympathetic humor and sociological perception" and his "instinct for what is genuinely American, be it good or bad." The very liveliness and diversity of Steinbeck's art contribute to his permanence and value in the American literary tradition.

Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902. The beautiful and expansive landscape of the fertile Salinas Valley, where Steinbeck spent hours as a boy roaming the hills, shaped his creative vision. He attended Stanford University intermittently from 1919-1925. Having decided to become a writer at age of fourteen, Steinbeck enrolled in this university in 1919 only to take the literature courses that he was interested in and would help him achieve his end; he left in 1925 without taking a degree. In the mid 1920s, he supported himself



briefly as a laborer and journalist in New York City, and then returned to California to work as a caretaker for a Lake Tahoe estate. Author of more than thirty books, Steinbeck achieved his first popular and critical successes with two short novels, *Tortilla Flats* (1935) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937). And with *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) based on his visits to Depression-era migrant labor camps in California's Central Valley, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, Steinbeck arrived at international renown. His work in the early 1940s was highly varied but less well-received. When the war broke out in Europe, he went to North Africa and Italy as a correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, out of which came several journalistic books. Critical acclaim returned to Steinbeck with two postwar novels set in his native California, *Cannery Row* (1945) and *East of Eden* (1952). And he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

Many of Steinbeck's novels and stories are set in and around the Salinas Valley. His characters includes mainly the rebels, the outcasts, the underdogs of the society he was in---ranch-hands, Okies, fruit-pickers, cotton-pickers, small farmers in California. He represents them as victims of injustice, the special forms of injustice being chiefly results of the mechanization of agriculture, or of such malevolent political or natural forces as progress, scarcity, or drought.

Through mutual cooperation, the will to adapt, and a mystical religious faith in the power of the just individual, they are usually able to survive destructive circumstances. Through describing the initiative and dignity of those individuals in the face of hardship, Steinbeck showed his support for those exploited and expressing his sympathies to the plight of the impoverished and the downtrodden.

Distinguished for versatility displayed in his sharp writing style, wry humor, lucid prose, engaging naturalistic descriptions, and an impressively broad range of themes and techniques, Steinbeck wins much critical acclaim. Close attention will reveal in Steinbeck's works as a whole those qualities of insight and discipline which are essential to the creation of great art.

Although they may differ in form, pace and diction, his books inevitably had certain points in common. For example, the California setting, specifically the Salinas Valley setting is the common scene of most of his works binding together the rather extensive body of novels, short stories, sketches, and plays. More important than the common scene is that much of Steinbeck's writings are characterized with Biblical symbolism and allusions, through which he examines "the myth of America as Edenic paradise".<sup>1</sup> Even with a random

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<sup>1</sup> Timmerman, John H. *John Steinbeck's Fiction: the Aesthetics of the Road Taken*. London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986: 4.

skim the reader will perceive that Steinbeck's work are penetrated with simple, evocative, and representative figures or symbols from biblical patterns, and throughout his works he touched upon a wide range of Christian or neo-Christian ideas, which he often used to universalize his work. For instance, his use of Biblical names is an inviting topic yet to be investigated. *East of Eden* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, both the titles themselves are descriptive and symbolic, with the Eden theme and the Cain and Abel story predominant in the former work, a combination of Old and New Testament symbols pervasive in the latter one. The use of Biblical symbolism and allusions should be seen as an integrative technique that helps shape the plot and character development in many of his major works. Not simply a stylistic technique imposed on the work for aesthetic improvement, it not only serves as a thematic foundation for nearly all the work and the actions of the characters, but also is meant to evoke a certain consciousness in the reader, opening a door on the reader's own nature, as Steinbeck himself declared when writing *East of Eden*: "I have finally I think found a key to the story.... If this were just a discussion of Biblical lore, I would throw it out but it is not. It is using the Biblical story as a measure of ourselves."<sup>1</sup> As such, discovering the meanings and values of those symbolism

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<sup>1</sup> Steinbeck, John. *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*. New York: Viking Press, 1969.

and allusions is frequently essential to the interpretation of his works.

This thesis focuses on the four long novels in which the Christian themes are most evident: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden*, *In Dubious Battle* and *Of Mice and Men*. It is meant to discuss and recognize Steinbeck's literary use of the Scriptures and careful artistic crafting of Biblical symbolism and allusions so as to better understand the major themes and structures of his fiction and to help gain his imaginative insights for and disclose Steinbeck's view of human nature to the reader.

## **Chapter I *The Grapes of Wrath***

### **1.1 General Introduction of *The Grapes of Wrath***

*The Grapes of Wrath*, an accurate and moving account of the mass migration during the American Depression, was the basis for the Nobel Award. In this work, Steinbeck provided the world with its most searing and enduring images of American rural poverty, disillusionment with the promise of The American Dream, and regional and class tensions in America. No one doubts that it marks Steinbeck's permanence in American literature.

The novel's main characters are the twelve members of the Joad family: Grampa, Granma, Pa, Ma, their children Winfield, Ruthie, Noah, Al, Tom (just returned from prison), Rosasharn and her husband Connie, and Uncle John, joined by the ex-preacher Jim Casy. Driven by social and economic forces that are beyond their ability to control, the family have to pull up stakes and move west to California, where they expect to find work as field hands. During the long journey the Joads find that they are part of a large migration of people with whom they share dangers and privations---especially the Wilson family. En route Grampa and Granma Joad die, while Noah leaves the family. The rest of them arrive in California to find the labor market glutted with families like themselves, resented and disliked by the inhabitants, exploited mercilessly by

the large growers and oppressed by the police. Then Connie deserts the family; Jim Casey is arrested, appears later as a labor organizer but is killed by vigilantes, one of whom is in return killed by Tom, who then becomes a fugitive; Rosasharn's baby is a stillborn, and the novel ends with Rosasharn gives her milk to an anonymous old man in the barn

## **1.2 Biblical Symbolism and Allusions and Their Interpretations**

Throughout the novel, it's not difficult to take note of a sequence of Christian symbols in both Old and New Testaments, because they are so obvious and abundant. In fact, it is these symbols that impart this work its emotional impact.

In this novel, Biblical devices are employed in many aspects, such as the novel's titles, its characters and their names, as well as its prose style, events, and structure. The following part is meant to explore fully the Christian symbolism in these aspects.

Firstly is the novel's title. It is itself a direct Christian allusion, revealing that the story exists in Christian context, and indicating that we should expect to find some Christian meaning. Taken from Julia Ward Howe's song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," ("Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the

Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored”<sup>1</sup>, which alludes to the Book of Revelation in the Bible, containing prophecies of the coming Apocalypse: “And the angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.” (*Revelation* 14:19-20). Actually this passage is based on passages in the Old Testament such as “For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.”(*Deuteronomy* 32:32), and “In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”(*Jeremiah* 31:29). And the reference is reinforced in one of the novel’s interchapters: “In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, heavy for the vintage.” The grapes symbolically presage divine retribution upon the oppressor and thus envision a strong freedom.

Yet the grapes also take another meaning in the novel. In *Numbers* 13: 23-27, Joshua and Oshea come to the Brook of Eshocol in Canaan and go back with a large branch of grapes as a sign of “the land of milk and honey”, a

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<sup>1</sup> Mckenna, C. W. F. *Notes on "The Grapes of Wrath"*. London: York Press, 1980. 47.

cluster so huge that “they bare it between two on a staff.” This corresponds to the prophecy of *Deuteronomy* 23: 24 that the Israelites would eat their fill of grapes. These examples in the Bible indicate the grapes’ another meaning---symbol of plenty and promise. It is this meaning of grapes that is frequently alluded to by Grampa Joad. Grampa mentioned several times of the grapes. First time, he dreamed: “ Jus’let me et out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There’s a thing I ain’t never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch of grapes off a bush, or whatever, an’ I’m gonna squash ‘em on my face an’let ‘em run offen my chin”” (John, 1980:112) Second, Grampa declares: ““They’s grapes out there, just a-hangin’ over into the road. Know what I’m a-gonna do? I’m gonna pick me a wash tub full a grapes, an’ I’m gonna set in ‘em, an’ scrooge aroun’, an’ let the juice run down my pants””(John, 1980:141). And once again: “I’m getting’ hungry. Come time we get to California I’ll have a big bunch a grapes in my han’ all the time, a-nibblin’ off it all the time, by God!””(John, 1980:141). For Grampa, and for the Joads too, grapes stand for the dream of the promised land. But the promised land is in fact a vicious land, pervasive with greed. It turned out to be a land that “ain’t no lan’ of milk an’ honey” (John, 1980: 276). Thus the grapes of plenty and promise become bitter and are replaced by the grapes of wrath.



The influence of Bible is also evident in Steinbeck's prose styles demonstrated in Steinbeck's language in his descriptive and expository passages, which is a close imitation of the English Bible in the King James Version, particularly the prophetic books such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, by echoing the phrasing and vocabulary in it.

Let's look at the characteristics of the Bible's language, exemplified as in the passages below:

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. (*Genesis 4: 1-7*)

This passage is characterized with the qualities of simplicity, purity, strength,

and vigor. And it is easy to find in vocabulary, rhythm, and tone apparent similar qualities in the novel's language. As an example, let's look at the opening paragraph, describing the drought:

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the gray country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. In the last part of May the sky grew pale and the clouds that had hung in high puffs for so long in the spring were dissipated. The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.

In this passage, The themes of *red*, *gray*, *green*, and *earth* are developed correspondingly as follows: *red* to pink, *gray* to white, *green* to brown, and ploughed *earth* to thin hard crust. And the structural rhythm of each sentence is echoed in the paragraph as a whole.

The extent to which this prose style is indebted to the Old Testament is also demonstrated in the opening paragraph of chapter 17:

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to the water. And because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there. (John, 1980: 264)

Through employing Biblical devices as triadic phrasing, augmentations such as “near to” and “it might be,” repetitions of word and phrase, and exact echoes such as “found it good”, this passage imparts dignity and solemnity to the miserable plight of the Okies.

This kind of prose style, through its inescapable association with the Bible, speaks with the force and authority of an Old Testament prophet and thus gives passages moving tenderness and prophetic power. Like the prose style, the

structure of the work also has its roots in the Old Testament.

*The Grapes of Wrath* consists of altogether thirty consecutive chapters. In fact, although not formally so divided, these chapters can be divided into three major parts: the dispossession, migration, and resettlement of a people. The first part ends with chapter 10, followed by two interchapters which set it apart from the second part. The first of these chapters presents a picture of the deserted land—"The houses were left vacant on the land, and the land was vacant because of this." The second interchapter is devoted to Highway 66 and is followed by chapter 13, which begins the migration part---"The ancient overloaded Hudson creaked and grunted to the highway at Sallisaw and turned west, and the sun was blinding." This part ends with chapter 18, "And the truck rolled down the mountain into the great valley," and the next chapter introduces the labor conditions in that state, and thus the resettlement part begins.

These three parts correspond respectively to the oppression and bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, their exodus, and their entrance into the Land of Canaan. In both accounts the Promised Land is first glimpsed from a mountaintop. And the main design of the parallels is obvious: the plagues in Egypt have their parallel in the erosion in Oklahoma; the Egyptian oppressors, in the bank officials; the exodus of Israelites, in the migrants' journey; the hostile

Canaanites, in the equally hostile Californians.

On this ground, we are to discuss the Biblical parallels of the migrant Okies and the novel's three characters of significance and complexity---Casy, Tom, and Rosasharn.

Like the Israelites homeless and persecuted, the migrants too flee from oppression, and wander through a wilderness of hardships, seeking their own Promised Land. And as there are twelve tribes of Israel, there are twelve Joads (including Rosasharon's husband Connie). They mount the truck in ark fashion, two by two:

...the rest swarmed up on to of the load, Connie and Rose of Sharon, Pa and Uncle John, Ruthie and Winfield, Tom and the preacher. Noah stood on the ground looking up at the great load of them sitting on top of the truck. (John, 1980: 22)

Again, Ma Joad's frequent assertion that "We are the people" is the reminiscence of the Jewish faith in God's promise that the Jews are a chosen people, since when Tom is looking for a suitable verse to bury with Grampa, she tells him: "Turn to Psalms, over further. You kin always get somepin outa Psalms." And from Psalms she chooses the phrase: "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." (95: 7) And when, near the end of the novel, Uncle John sets Rose of Sharon's stillborn child in an old

apple crate among the willow stem of a stream and floats it away, saying, "Go down an' tell 'em," it is the counterpart of Moses in a basket among the bulrushes.

Besides, as the Jews formulated new codes of law to govern themselves in their Exodus (see the Book of Deuteronomy), so the migrants evolve new codes of conduct: "The families learned what rights must be observed---the right of privacy in the tent; the right to keep the past black hidden in the heart; the right to refuse help or accept it, to offer help or to decline it; the right of son to court and the daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights."(John, 1980: 103) Actually, Chapter 17 can be seen as the Deuteronomy of the Joads' Journey "out west", an archetype of mass migration. The frequency of allusion suggests the basic similarity between the plight of the Joads and that of the Israelites.

Further use of Christian symbols can be found in the Casy-Christ relationship. Casy represents a contemporary adaptation of the Christ image, and his conversion to a social gospel represents a movement from Old Testament to New Testament thought, an expanded horizon of responsibility.

As we all know, Jesus withdrew into the wilderness for meditation and consecration for a period before he began his mission; Jim Casy, whose initials

are identified with Jesus Christ, embarks upon his mission after a long period of retreat as he tells Tom, "I went off alone, an' I sat and figured." And another time, when meeting Tom in the strikers' tent, he says he has "been a-goin' into the wilderness like Jesus to try to find out sumpin."

Like Jesus, Jim has rejected the rigidity of the old ideas of religion and justice, such as theological notions of sin ("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 is in process of replacing it with a new gospel. In the introductory scene with Tom Joad, they recall the old days when Casy preached the old religion, expounded the old concept of sin and guilt. Now, however, Casy considers himself wicked, depraved and ultimately doomed because human frailty prevented his achieving the purity demanded by the old religion. The old Adam of the fall is about to be banished out of the new dispensation.

Casy's breaking down of the old religion enables him to develop an awareness of collectivity. Tom recalls his words:

"Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness an' no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole." (John, 1980: 570)

With the growth of his social consciousness, Casy moves from *blood-of-the-Lamb* evangelism to social prophecy, his Christianity broadened. He defines the religious impulse as human love and identifies the Holy Spirit as the human spirit in all mankind. He says, "What's this call, this sperit?... It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust sometime," which paraphrase the words of Jesus, who said, "God is love," and "A new commandment give I unto you: that ye love one another," in the New Testament. This is the truth Casy has found in his wilderness. And what he finally learns, in jail after giving himself up to save Tom and Floyd, is that man's spiritual brotherhood must express itself in a social unity, which is why he becomes a labor organizer. Casy preaches his new gospel as a new revelation to save the Okies from destruction and the world from economic warfare.

Of course, Casy realizes, as did Jesus, that organized religion will reject his new gospel. "You can't hold no church with idears like that," Tom points this out, "People would drive you out of the country with idears like that." In both cases, people did. But he is still preaching for the cause, sacrificing selflessly himself for it. His Christ-like development is complete when he is killed in the middle of a stream, which can be taken symbolically to represent the "crossing over Jordan" Christian motif. He says to his assailants, "You fellas



don' know what you're a-doin'," which is reminiscent of Christ's "Father forgive them; they know not what they do" when crucified.

Another important character---Tom Joad symbolically equates with Moses before he becomes the disciple of Casy, and after, with Jesus.

In him there are sufficient attributes to identify him as a type of Moses at the beginning. For example, he leads his people as they journey toward the Promised Land. And like Moses, he has committed an act of violence by killing a man and has been away for a time before rejoining his people and becoming their leader. He has a younger brother who serves as a vehicle for the leader, just as Moses has Aaron as his spokesman-truck driver. Before reaching California, he hears and rejects the evil reports of some Oklahomans going back from it, like Moses did to Hebrew "spies" before he got into the Promised Land. The parallel is carried out until the journey to California is completed and Tom becomes a disciple of Casy's gospel.

His succession to the role of Christ the Messiah, or Saviour, is complete in the scene in which he tells Ma goodbye and explains why he must leave. He has told Ma about Casy who, "Spouted out some Scripture once, an' it didn' soun' like no hell-fire Scripture." He goes on to repeat what Casy told him about two being better than one and rehearses Casy's teaching about the individual and the

collective soul, recalling that Casy went into a wilderness to find his soul, then found. "His little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole." he explains to Ma Casy's theory of Christian Socialism. "'Tom,' Ma repeated, 'What you gonna do?' 'What Casy done,' he said." (John, 1980:106) Tom's speech paraphrases the words of Christ recorded in *Luke 4: 18* and *Matthew 7: 3* and *25:35-45*, as well as in *Isaiah 65:21-22*: "And they shall build houses and inhabit them, they shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat." And when Ma objects: "How'm I gonna know 'bout you? They might kill ya an' I souldn' know. They might hurt ya. How'm I gonna know?" Tom responds by citing Casy's logic:

[if] "a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a bi one.... Then it don't matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where---wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'---I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the house they build---why I'll be there. See?" (John, 1980: 572)

Like Casy, Tom is ready to lay down his life for his fellow men in his struggle for wholeness and at-one-ness with the world. In this way, He gradually grows

strong and becomes the son of God.

Rosasharn also gathers to herself multiple Christian aspects. Her real name, Rose of Sharon, taken from the Song of Solomon “I am the Rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley”, is frequently interpreted as referring to Christ. In the last scene, Rosaharn, her baby born dead, is rain-drenched, weak, her breasts heavy with milk. In the barn she feeds her milk to a starving old man, which is the supreme symbol of the Christian religion, a reference to the orthodox interpretation of Canticles: “I [ Christ ] am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (2: 1); and to the Last Supper when Christ tells his disciples: “take, eat; this is my body.” The Song of Solomon also contains the line, “This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.” And thus Grampa, though dying long before the Joads get to California, is symbolically present through the anonymous old man in the barn, because his image for the plenty of California had been a “big bunch a grapes” which he could squash on his face until the juice ran down his chin. Rosasharn gives what Christ gave, what we receive in memory of Him and becomes the Resurrection and the Life. Through her, life triumphs over death. The ultimate mystery of the Christian religion is realized as Rosasharn “Looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.” She smiles mysteriously because what

has been mystery is now knowledge.

The Biblical symbolism and allusions mentioned above are but a scattered sampling of the many, through which the theme is revealed. They bring to conclusion a whole level of the novel that exists in religious terms. Furthermore, and more important, they bring together and make one in the lives of its major characters the novel's social message and certain precepts of Christianity. There is no question that through the abundance, diversity, and intensity of its Biblical symbolism and allusions the novel imbues its social message with a religious fervor and sanction. The passing of time has proved *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the great books in literary history.

## Chapter II *East of Eden*

### 2.1 General Introduction of *East of Eden*

*East of Eden*, first published in 1952, is professedly Steinbeck's most ambitious novel, as Steinbeck intended it to be his last great effort to write the great American novel which seemed expected of great authors. Steinbeck called this book "The big one as far as I'm concerned. Always before I held something back for later. Nothing is held back here." Although to most critics and general readers, *East of Eden* can't surpass *The Grapes of Wrath*, it still became number one on the fiction best-seller list in November 1952, and has never been out of print since. Up to now, *East of Eden* has attracts much critical acclaim.

*East of Eden*, a daring combination of biography and fiction, is both an allegorical and realistic novel. The book, set in rural California in the years around the turn of the century, tells the story of two American families over three generations, whose history reflect the formation of the United States when "the Church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously..." As a family epic ranging from the Civil War to World War I, it begins with an accurate, factual account of Steinbeck's own maternal family, the Hamiltons, and the author himself appears sporadically in the novel as the narrator "I", as "me," and as "John." Steinbeck calls the novel "...the story of my country and

the story of me” in *A Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letter*, the writer’s diary of *East of Eden*. The book also tells about another family, the fictional Trasks, which is also the center of the book.

Generally, *East of Eden* can be divided into four Parts. The first part ranges from 1862 to 1900, in which the Trask and Cathy stories are developed until Adam Trask marries Cathy. Part Two, from 1900 to 1902, brings the two families, Trasks and Hamiltons together in the Salinas Valley. In this part, Cathy abandons her husband and her twins, and become a whore (called Kate) in Salinas. Her story is carried to the point where by devious means she acquired ownership of the brothel in which she worked. This part ends with the naming of Cathy’s twins. In Part Three, happening between 1911 and 1912, the Hamilton story moves forward on its own from the last days of Samuel Hamilton to the deaths of Dessie and Tom Hamilton as its conclusion. As for the Trask story, Adam Trask becomes half alive after ten years of spiritual coma, and Cathy is totally absent. Part Four is from 1912 to 1918, about the story of Adam Trask and his sons after they had moved from the Trask ranch to Salinas. In this part, Cathy (changed to Kate) commits suicide; and the Hamilton story is touched upon only in Will Hamilton’s role as Cal Trask’s partner in a bean brokerage. The central narrative throughout is the fictional biography of Adam

Trask from his birth in the second year of the Civil War until his death in the last year of World War I.

## **2.2 Biblical Symbolism and Allusions and Their Interpretations**

*East of Eden* is a deliberately symbolic work. In this book, there are literally hundreds of allusions to the biblical story. Firstly, the title itself is an obvious example. It is chosen from *Genesis*, Chapter 4, verse 16, which tells how Cain “dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden” after being “cursed from the earth.” That’s where Steinbeck got his idea for “*East of Eden*.” The mythical vehicle of moral message, then, is the retelling of the story of Cain and Abel through the tragic history of the Trasks, which begins in Connecticut just after the Civil War and follows the lives of the Trask family across three generations to California. In the family, the three generations of brothers must resolve disputes between one another; in each conflict, evil results from the inexplicable rejection of one child’s gift to his father. Steinbeck maintained: “The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved.... And with rejection comes anger, and with anger, some kind of revenge for rejection, and with the crime, guilt---and there is the story of mankind.” The central narrative is the biography of Adam Trask, who attempts to create his Eden in the Salinas

Valley with Cathy, his beautiful but remote wife. She, who was sexually involved with Adam's brother, Charles, is a figure of evil and destruction, reminiscent of the biblical serpent. She gives birth to the twins Caleb and Aron before deserting Adam to assume a new identity as Kate, a vicious and sadistic prostitute. Caleb, whose gift Adam rejects, believes his desire for revenge to be preordained, and he exposes Aron to the truth about their mother. Although Aron is eventually destroyed by this revelation, Caleb is offered the possibility of salvation through understanding the meaning of *timshel*, a Hebrew word indicating humanity's power to choose between good and evil.

In *East of Eden*, Steinbeck also uses the method of suggestive Biblical allusion, especially the crucial allusions to Cain and Abel, exemplified firstly in the naming of the principal characters (with the exception of Sam Hamilton and Lee), which are heavily freighted with symbolism. In The Bible, Cain was evil; Abel was good. So, Steinbeck used his characters as symbols for good and evil. For example, Adam's sons are named Caleb and Aaron (Aaron likes hunting but Caleb is a gardener). And other bad characters, are identified with Cain by names beginning with "C"- Cyrus, Charles, Cathy and Caleb, while other good characters with Abel by names beginning with A - Adam, Alice, Aaron and Abra. In a novel that places such significance on naming as knowing, Cathy's names



may attract the attention of the reader. They first meet her in chapter 8 as Cathy Ames, but by the next chapter, where she tries to destroy Mr. Edwards, her name has already slid to Catherine Amesbury. When she arrives at the Trask farm, she is virtually nameless, feigning amnesia and not knowing who she is. As she takes over Fayer's warehouse, after becoming Cathy Trask, she adopts yet another name: Kate Albey. Cathy's changing names in the novel suggest she is like a monster, unknowable and chameleonic.

The novel's allegorical framework is indicated also in its focal characters who bring meaning and focus into what superficially seems a sprawling narrative full of unguided life. In each generation of the Trask family, two brothers play the leading roles and in each case there is some sort of Cain-Abel relationship between them.

In the case of Adam-Charles relationship, Charles, after being refused the gift by his father, bears jealousy to Adam. In reaction he beats Adam and later wants to kill him with an ax. He doesn't succeed, and does feel remorse for his act, just like Cain was filled with remorse upon slaying Abel. When Adam returns from his enlistment, Charles tries to reconcile with him, which proves impossible. It is because there is a psychological horror in Charles, which sets him apart and separates him from others. He explains to Adam, "I ought to be

wandering around the world instead of sitting here on a good farm...”(John, 1952:72) In the Bible, Cain, after murdering Abel, is driven from the company of men, and the Lord lays the mark of protection upon him: “And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden” (*Genesis* 4: 15-16). Likewise, Charles gets a scar too, “It just seems like I was marked. And when I go into town, like to the inn, why, people are always looking at it. I can hear them talking about it....”, a mark both of sin and protection. He also lives in isolation on the Trask farm, his land of Nod, plowing the earth alone.

As for Adam, he is a representatively perplexed character, fallible, gullible, and intelligent, who thinks he has found his earthly paradise in the Salinas Valley. After leaving the family land and went west to California, he is deserted by Cathy after she gives birth to twins, Caleb and Aaron, as they are later named. In this way he lost his Eden-- a happy life with Cathy and his children on excellent farm land in the Salinas Valley. This sends him into a moral wilderness. But later he comes out of it. And internally consistent with the symbolism of the title, he achieves the belief that he is not to find an Eden but

to learn to live east of it---in a fallen world of mortal evil.

Next, we come to another Cain-Abel type relationship---the Aron-Caleb relationship, which is, in fact, the focus of the second half of the book. Of the two sons, Adam preferred Aaron (later spelled Aron), who raised Belgian hares in boyhood (a parallel to the herdsman role). The less favored son Caleb (later spelled Cal), who wants to be a farmer, made a sum of money through selling bean crops to the British Purchasing Agency with Will Hamilton. He gave the money to his father in hope of pleasing him, who has suffered great losses in a business venture. But considering the money as war profit, unjustly gained, and comparing it unfairly to Aron's success in entering Stanford one year earlier, Adam cruelly refused Cal's gift. In revenge, Cal takes Aron to the Kate's whorehouse and tells him Kate is their mother. To Cal's expectation, Aron, who always thought his mother as an angelic one dying in his infancy, gets shocked so profoundly that he gives up the Episcopal ministry, and enlists in the army next morning to fight in World War I. When Adam asks Cal, "Where is your brother?" and Cal answers, "How do I know? Am I supposed to look after him", it reminds us of the dialogue between Cain and the Lord in the Bible. Soon Aron is sent to France, and died in action. Thus, like Cain killed Abel, Cal is responsible, if indirectly, for the death of Aron.

The Cain and Adam theme fares well as it is worked out in Cal, who inherits both good and evil and in whom a genuine moral struggle takes place. When Cal uses his knowledge of Cathy to hurt Aron, his cruelty is followed by remorse: "Cal came close to him and hugged him and kissed him on the cheek, ' I won't do it any more,' he said" (John, 1952:339) Again, at the words Aron says to him after exposed to the truth about his mother: "I'd like to know why you do it. You're always at something. I just wonder why you do it. I wonder what's it good for" (John, 1952: 374-75), Cal feels himself loathsome and at a loss: "A pain pierced Cal's heart. His planning suddenly seemed mean and dirty to him. He knew that his brother had found him out. And he felt a longing for Aron to love him. He felt lost and hungry and he didn't know what to do" (John, 1952:375). In a letter to Pascal Covici while working on the last section of the book, Steinbeck talked about Cal, "He is the everyman, the battleground between good and evil, the most human of all, the sorry man.... In that battle the survivor is both."

Between these characters is Cathy. She is described in the novel as a monster, devoid of moral sensibility. She is the kind of woman, who, on the wedding night, puts sleeping medicine in Adam's tea so that she could enter Charles' bed; and she appears to have been impregnated by both brothers, for

she born non-identical twins, one of whom, Caleb, looked like Charles and was like Charles in nature. Later she deserts her husband and sons to become a whore. In keeping with Steinbeck's Biblical use of the Eden story, Cathy's mythical trappings are intertwined with the biblical serpent who lured Adam and Eve into the transgression that drove them out of Eden. Her serpent nature is emphasized in her heart-shaped face, an abnormally small mouth, a little pointed tongue that sometimes flicked around her lips, small sharp teeth with the canine teeth longer and more pointed than the others, tiny ears without lobes and pressed close to her head, unblinking eyes, narrow hips, in addition to her dislike of the light. (John, 1952: 122) She is attractive, in some way paralleling to the lure of the serpent in *Genesis*: "(the fruit of the tree) was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired." Moreover, like the serpent described as "more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made", Cathy is subtly described when she takes over Faye's whorehouse as knowing the secrets of men, and is subtly adept, in Adam Trask's eyes, in using "all the sad, weak parts of a man." (John, 1952: 219-20) And like Charles, Cathy also gets the mark of sin---a livid scar on the forehead, which looks like "a huge thumbprint, even to whorls of wrinkled skin", left when beaten by the whoremaster. In a word, Cathy is presented as a figure of unmitigated evil and

spiritual brutality. She at last is consumed by her own evil, outstripped by her monstrous plots. Threatened by Ethel, then by Joe Valery, she retreats finally to the dim hole of her lean-to and finally to the black night of her suicide.

There are possibly hundreds of such allusions to the details of those sixteen verses in *Genesis* which contain the story of Cain and Abel. Actually, the reworking of the story functions as the vehicle for the novel's theme, just as the title suggests, because Mr. Steinbeck did not stop with the attempt to embody a meaningful myth in the chronicle history of a modern family. He goes on to draw a further moral and to pronounce a further thesis. The thesis, in barest terms, is, first, that Good and Evil are absolute not relative things, for there is Good and Evil in everyone, and second, that in making a choice between them man is a free agent, not the victim of his heredity, his environment, or of anything else.

Steinbeck sees this story in *Genesis* as a true account of man's condition, which is casually announced in a long and profoundly interesting discussion of the Cain-Abel story. Those taking part in the discussion are Samuel Hamilton, the most convincingly lovable failure in the novel, humanly good and errant, Lee, a plausible learned Chinese who was raised a Presbyterian, and Adam. Lee said to Adam and Sam, "(The story) is the symbol story of the human soul,"

“the best-known story in the world because it is everybody’s story.” Steinbeck’s another religious point is also firstly mentioned by Lee, who says, “Every man is potentially Cain (including Abel)... [Every] human being has the power to choose, whatever his conditioning.” (John, 1952:11-12)

There are several other longer passages in the book in which both the author and his characters discuss the Cain and Abel theme and make Steinbeck’s thesis clearer. Ten years after the first discussion, the three men gather for the last time. This time Lee clears up the difficulties concerning the meaning of a phrase which refers, apparently, to “sin”, in the Lord’s words to Cain after rejecting his sacrifice, as given in *Genesis 4: 7* in the King James version, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him”, but in the American Standard Bible as “Do thou rule over him”. With the help of four aged Chinese sages (the youngest one is over ninety), who investigate the problem too, spending two years studying Hebrew for just this purpose, they translates the verb form *timshol*, “thou mayest rule” instead of “thou shalt rule”. “Don’t you see?” Lee cried, “The American Standard translation orders men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in ‘Thou shalt,’ meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the

Hebrew word, the word *timshel*---'Thou mayest'---that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world." (John, 1952: 304) This, Lee said in triumph, "was the gold from our mining": the translation "thou shalt rule" implies predestination; but "thou mayest rule" gives a man a choice: he can master sin if he wants to. "'Thou mayest,'" Lee said, "might be the most important word in the world," for "that makes a man great, ... for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice."

This, then, is the message of *East of Eden*, and the central core around which all the action convincingly moves and has its meaning: every man has the power to choose between good and evil. This message, once more, is brought into focus at the end of the novel when Adam Trask is dying. He is being reborn from a new angle. As Jackson J. Benson says: "Earlier, he could not see his wife for what she was because of his romantic projections, and then he could not see his sons because of a religious reaction which replaced his romanticism. Now, at last, he gains an opportunity to see things as they are when he realizes that man is not bound by the scheme of sin and virtue, but man is free to be, and in being, he is what he is. By freeing himself, Trask is able to



bless and free his son.”<sup>1</sup>

This epic novel about individual ethics --- whether men and women have the power to choose between good and evil, is regarded by Steinbeck himself as the culmination of his career. And it did draw and has been drawing positive reviews. However, some critics point out that the symbolism and allegorical structure is too overt to leave imagination for the reader. And many reviewers point out that because he tried to say too many things at once, and doesn't put his diverse materials in order, Stienbeck fails to achieve fictional concentration. And some even criticize: that the author is truly confused on this question of free will is evident in other moral essays scattered throughout the book. For example, they point out, while Samuel and the Chinese servant, Lee, explain the Cain and Abel story, and thus the Trask story, as giving evidence of man's free will in choosing between good and evil, Lee later denies free will to Adam Trask: "He couldn't help it, Cal. That's his nature. It was the only way he knew. He didn't have any choice." The author himself also denied free will to the wicked by saying: "And just as there are physical monsters, can there not be mental or psychic monsters born? The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the

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<sup>1</sup> Benson, Jackson J. "John Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist." *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 9. Ed. Thomas Votteler. London: Gale Research Inc., 1993. 517.

same process produce a malformed soul? .... It is my belief that Cathy was born with the tendencies, or lack of them, which drove and forced her all her life. Some balance wheel was misweighted, some gear out of ratio. She was not like other people, never was from birth.”<sup>1</sup> Besides, quite suddenly near the end of the novel, that Cathy, a monster all through, has become a religious penitent (Episcopal) and has committed suicide because of moral loneliness, leaving a great fortune to her “Abel” son, Aaron. This fortune amounts to over a hundred thousand dollars, the same sum that Cyrus left his sons and that Charles left Adam.

Yet aside from these doubts and what the novel may fail to do, one thing is sure, that is, Steinbeck has written an intensely interesting and impressive parable. By way of carefully sustained Biblical symbolism, the novel works thematically with tension, grapples with the problem of good and evil, and provides profound insights into human nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Steinbeck, John. *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*. New York: Viking Press, 1969.

## Chapter III *Of Mice and Men* and *The Dubious Battle*

### 3.1 *Of Mice and Men*

#### 3.1.1 General Introduction of *Of Mice and Men*

*Of Mice and Men* (1937) is one of Steinbeck's most compressed and unified works, with which Steinbeck achieved national recognition and gathered immediate popular acclaim as a leading American writer.

The title itself is from the context of Burns's poem.

*But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft a-gleyo  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain  
For promis'd joy.*

In the poem, Burns extends the mouse's experience to include that of mankind. "This is the way things are," he said. While in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck extends the experience of two migrant workers to the human condition.

The background is in Depression-era California, and most of the characters are unskilled migrant farm hands who drift about here and there, picking up temporary jobs or doing short-term field work and then moving on to the next place of employment. Steinbeck revolves around the experiences of two itinerant field workers Lennie Small and Tgeorge Milton over a three-day period, from Thursday evening through Sunday evening (coincide with the

period Christ was crucified before resurrection). Big, blundering, simpleminded, Lennie possesses great physical strength. He becomes unwittingly destructive sometimes, because he never remembers things, and always forgets about not squeezing too hard soft and smooth things he loves, like the puppies and mice. The consequence is that he keeps getting George and himself into trouble. George, little and clever, out of an obligation imposed upon by Lenny's aunt, takes Lennie into his keeping as they move from one ranch to another. The pair try to save money dreaming of one day buying a small farm of their own, where they will "belong", where Lennie may look after the rabbits "when he is good", and where they might live in comfort and independence. They find work on a ranch and meet a coworker who promises to invest his earnings for the purchase of a farm. Before the dream can be realized, however, Lennie accidentally kills the conniving wife of his employers' son when startled by her frightened reaction to his innocent petting. George finds Lennie in hiding and mercifully shoots him to spare him a crueler and more frightening death by a lynch mob. The novel ends with George walking to town to spend his money, abandoning his dream of buying a farm.

### **3.1.2 Biblical Allusions and Their Interpretation.**

*Of Mice and Men* has engendered diverse interpretations. Some consider George representative of the rationality of the mind and Lennie representative of the appetites of the body; accordingly they interpret Lennie's dependence on George to kill Lennie as the mind's responsibility for the actions of the body.

While some perceives the story to be a tragedy, regarding the relationship between George and Lennie the key to interpreting the work. In fact, this is not only a pastoral novel addresses the theme of the individual's destiny to live in isolation which Steinbeck confirms through George's loss of Lennie, but generally also an parable about man's fate in a fallen world, based on the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel, in which Cain is banished from his family to wander alone.

The reader will observe that theme of loneliness and isolation is introduced in the opening dialogue between George and Lennie, when George laments,

"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. They come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to."

This sense of the loneliness and isolation of the migrant field hands is reflected several times in the work. And throughout the novel, other characters, Crooks, Candy, and Curley wife all exhibit some form of loneliness. Old Candy, working as "Swamper" on the ranch, after hearing of George and Lennie's dream of owning a piece of land, he is captivated and decides to help out by investing his earnings. Obviously, he has been sick of loneliness, longing for companion. When saying he would give his share of the house to the pair, his reason is "... 'cause I ain't got no relatives nor nothing." Crooks, the crippled

black ranch hand, is isolated in a world of physically powerful white men due to his race, barred from their quarters and sleeps in a "long box filled with straw". He complains bitterly to Lennie about the psychological effects of constant loneliness, "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you....I tel ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick." He goes so far as to offer to work for them for nothing if George and Lennie will take him along. And another hopelessly alienated character, Curley's wife, actually serves to reinforce the theme of loneliness and isolation. She hangs around the bunkhouse relentlessly, although not encouraged by any of the men. And to the charge that she is a tart, she pleads innocent and claims that she is only lonesome, "I got nobody to talk to. I got nobody to be with....I want to see somebody. Just see 'em an' talk to 'em." Her desperate need for companionship can also be reflected in a comment uttered by Whit, "She's just workin' on everybody all the time. Seems like she's even workin' on the stable buck. I don't know what the hell she wants." It is the loneliness that makes her approach Lennie, allowing him to stroke her hair without knowing Lennie's tendency to crush the things he loves to feel. So her death committed unintentionally by Lennie and the tragic outcome of the story can actually trace to her loneliness and isolation.

This theme of loneliness, in fact, can be brought into a larger allegorical theme. William Goldhurst thinks, "*Of Mice and Men* is a story about the nature of man's fate in a fallen world," and "is the fulfillment of the Lord's curse on

Cain.”<sup>1</sup>

According to *Genesis* 4: 3-16, after Adam and Even were expelled out of Eden for eating forbidden fruit, they gave birth to two sons, with the older one Cain, the other Abel. Cain was a farmer and Abel a shepherd. The Lord preferred the offering Abel made to him than that of Cain. Cain bore discontent and killed his brother as they both worked on the farm. When the Lord asked Cain where his brother is, Cain answered, “I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?” For his crime of murder, as punishment, the Lord banished Cain from His company and from the company of his parents and set upon his a particular curse, “...And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt be thou in the earth.” And for Cain’s fear that other men would hear of his crime and try to kill him, the Lord set a mark upon him to protect him from the wrath of others. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and live in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. What Steinbeck presents in *Of Mice and Men* is the fate of loneliness and vagrancy of man as descendant of Cain, who can’t possess or enjoy the fruits of their labor. He poses the question in the novel: is man destined to live alone, a solitary wanderer on the face of the earth, or is it the fate of man to care for man, to go his way in companionship with another? This is the same question that Steineck expounds more

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<sup>1</sup> Goldhurst, William. “‘Of Mice and Men’: John Stienbeck’s Parable of the Curse of Cain.” *Western American Literature* VI.2 (1971): 123-35.

specifically and explicitly in his later work *East of Eden*, in which Steinbeck has his main characters read the Biblical story aloud and declare that "...This is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody's story. ...It is the symbol story of the human soul."

The punishment on Cain is manifested mainly through the fate of George and Lennie. They are homeless wanderer, agricultural worker who till on the farm but can't enjoy their labor fruits. Like Cain, they are fugitive, running from a place to another. At the beginning, the novel emphasizes the loyalty and fraternity of their relationship, and the security, happiness and warmth it contains. But the relationship seems unusual in the eyes of others. They are driven towards the curiosity of the pair's fellowship because they do not have that support in their life. The boss doubts that George's caring for Lennie can be unselfish. He suspects that George is taking Lennie's pay. "You takin' his pay away from him? I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy." George responds hesitantly, "He's my ...cousin. I told his old lady I'd take care of him." (John, 1980: 25) He is forced to cover up a bit under the circumstances. Curley even suspects that they are sexually involved, indicating in an innuendo way, "so that's that way." Even the sympathetic Slim expresses suspicion too. In section two, he observes, "Ain't many guys travel around together.... I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other." Again, in section three, Slim comments:

"Funny how you an' him string along together....I hardly never seen two guys



travel together. You know how the hands are, they just come in and get their bunk and work a month, and then they quit and gout alone. Never seem to give a damn about nobody. It jus' seems kinda funny a cuckoo like him and a smart little guy like you travelin' together."

Although George complains repeatedly how easy he could get along if he didn't have Lennie on his tail, when he discovers Curley's wife's body, what he thinks immediately is the prospect of his becoming alone upon the loss of Lennie: He will work his month like others, and take his fifty bucks to dissipate them overnight in the whorehouse or poolroom. This is probably the conclusion that Steinbeck has hinted from the very beginning: Man is alone in nature, and whatever fellowship he attempts to establish will be doomed to fail, because Cain is reluctant to be the keeper of his brother.

George and Lennie's dream of owning their own farm, like their attempt to keep permanent fellowship, inevitably fails. In the failure, Curley's wife plays an important role. She is the only female in the novel, representing the force that can crush man. When Lennie and Candy are discussing their future farm in Crooks' room, she enters and insults them, laughing at their dream and threatening to invent the kind of accusation to get Crooks lynched. Crooks, after reminded of his position as a black man, immediately withdraws his offer to participate in other three's farm plan. Then, Candy hesitates too. Upon Lennie's murder of Curley's wife, the dream fails completely. The seemingly accidental event in fact contains inevitable elements. In George and Lennie's imagination,

the farm is too idealized. Their dependence on their shifting jobs and their social and economic weaknesses all keep the dream far from realizing. As descendant of Cain, George and Lennie are men driven out of Eden, men destined to vagabondize, but their idealized farm is the Eden before man's ancestor is banished from. Thus their ambition to retreat to the Eden is most unattainable in a fallen world, for paradise is lost, as the name of Steinbeck's hero, George Milton, indicates. The human condition may be described with the view of Crooks, who represents black despair: "Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkin' about it, but it's jus' in their head." (John, 1980: 81)

So far, we can say *Of Mice and Man* is a novel that can be read on two levels. Firstly it is a realistic novel. The themes of loneliness and the failure of dream are the most common ones in realistic works, which bear much truth. It is also an allegory. On this level, we can gain further understanding of the work. George and Lennie, were just ordinary itinerant agricultural workers, but their tragedy is one of lofty beauty because they bear the curse the Lord set on Cain. Their suffering reminds us of the compliant Cain made to the Lord: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." If because of eating the forbidden fruit, man's ancestor Adam was banished out of Eden, then because of killing his brother, Adam's son Cain made himself and his descendant bear forever the fate of homelessness and vagrancy

## **3.2 *In Dubious Battle***

### **3.2.1 General Introduction of *In Dubious Battle***

*In Dubious Battle*, published in 1936, is Steinbeck's another novel in the thirties concerning human behaviors during the depression. It's a relentlessly fast-paced, red-hot, and riveting novel of labor strife and social unrest. In fact, it can be ranked with the best of Steinbeck's writing.

Set on a California ranch, the book deals with a strike of migrant fruit pickers and the conflict that results between union organizers and monolithically organized apple growers. The strike then spirals out of control, as principled defiance changes into blind fanaticism. Telling from the angle of the strike leaders: Mac, Jim Nolan, and others, it depicts all the evils that industrialism had caused and brought to California--poverty and extreme wealth, strikes, and perversion of justice in the interest of ranch owners, exposing cruelty, cant and tyrannical power of those rapacious owners. It is also a story of a young man's struggle for identity, tracing the development of Jim Nolan from a new recruit to the Communist Party into an effective strike leader.

The main plot is as follows: Jim Nolan, when young, witnessed both his father's courage and his despair, and saw his mother give up even her religious faith as poverty and starvation overwhelmed the family. Embedded with the memory of his youth characterized with brutality and starvation, he joins the Communist Party in revolt against the capitalistic system which, he says, has ruined his family. Mac, another protagonist, is a veteran Communist. They are

assigned from the City as emissaries of the Party to the migrant workers of the fictional Torgas Valley, at a time when the fruit growers had cut wages lower than any worker thought possible. Mac then foments and organizes a strike. They find allies among the “fruit tramps”: Dakin and London, cautious planners and leaders men who are alternately respected and envied by the rabble. Working together, Mac teaches Jim to manipulate and to sacrifice individuals to further the cause. In the course of strike, Jim becomes increasingly impersonal, and briefly becomes its leader. His gifts as an organizer also become more apparent. As they fight with the scabs, troops, deputies, and vigilantes, all hirelings of the fruit growers, Mac comes to realize that every move they make will be countered by forces backed by organized and limitless resources. Ultimately, Jim is crushed in his service, killed by a shotgun in a vigilante ambush. At the end of the novel, Mac forces himself to make an impromptu but nonetheless formulaic funeral oration over Jim’s faceless corpse.

### **3.2.2 Biblical Symbolism or Allusions and Their Interpretation**

In this book, much of the action develops around one of Steinbeck’s familiar theme—that of the group as an entity. Steinbeck questions in the novel whether humanity is capable of postponing individual differences to work for the greater benefit of the group. Another theme emphatically stated and interwoven in the novel is the Christian theme. We can note many Christian symbolism and allusions in the work, though not so obvious as in *The Grapes of*

*Wrath and East of Eden,*

Firstly is the title. The title *In Dubious Battle* is from the lines in the first part of the argument of Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Innumerable force of Spirits armed,  
That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,  
His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
*In Dubious Battle* on the plains of Heaven,  
And shook His throne. What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost -- the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?

It's how Satan characterizes his rebellion against God. For the word "dubious", on Satan's part, it can be understood as "up for grabs"; while on the part of God's party, it can be interpreted as "fishy". For the bitter and bloody strike, the center of the novel, the double-edged meaning of the word fits well, depending the perspective of the reader.

Indicated by the title, a careful reading will reveal that there are many specific parallels between the novel and *Paradise Lost*. Firstly is the major event. In the novel, Jim and Mac organize and lead poor fruit-pickers to fight against powerful owners and their accomplices, just like Satan gathers other rebels and outcasts as his subordinates, and lead them to proceed with a boldly

insurrection against omnipotent God. And the battle of the fruit-pickers is just as hopeless as that of Satan and his angels against God's party, both of which win the reader's concern and sympathy in like manner. Moreover, we can find counterparts of many of the characters of the epic in *In Dubious Battle*. According to Joseph Fontenrose:

"Satan's role is obviously played by the Party as a collective person, although Jim or Mac or another may represent the Party in its Satanic role. In contemporary folklore the Devil's color is red. The Party secretary who received Jim's application for Party membership is Harry Nilson---the Old Harry is a popular name for the Devil. Probably the detail of Mac's exhaling steam from his mouth as he ate hot stew is meant to illustrate the identity of the Party and Satan. Particular identifications suggest themselves: London is Beelzebub as Satan's right-hand man; Dick, the 'bedroom radical,' who employed the social graces and masculine charm for the cause, is Belial; Sam, direct actionist, is Moloch calling for open war; and Burke, dissenter and stool pigeon in the strikers' camp, is Abdiel.... And the camp has a humble Pandaemonium in the crude wooden platform from which the strike leaders addressed the strikers' assemblies."<sup>1</sup>

Fontenrose also relates the opening passage of the novel to the opening of *Paradise Lost*. The opening passage of the novel reads:

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<sup>1</sup> Fontenrose, Joseph. *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963: 42-43.

At last it was evening. The lights in the street outside came on, and the Neon restaurant sign on the corner jerked on and off, exploding its hard red light in the air. Into Jim Nolan's room the sign threw a soft red light. For two hours Jim had been sitting in a small, hard rocking-chair, his feet up on the white bedspread. Now that it was quite dark, he brought his feet down to the floor and slapped the sleeping legs.

In comparison to that of *Paradise Lost*, Fontenrose presents:

This (*In Dubious Battle*) will be a novel about Reds, but the red light means much more than that; for *Paradise Lost* opens with Satan lying in defeat, "rowing in the fiery Gulfe" (*Paradise Lost* 1:52); there in a "dismal Situation waste and Wilde" he was surrounded by flames: "yet from those flames/ No light, but rather darkness visible," in regions where "hope never comes/ That comes to all" (*Paradise Lost* 1:60-67). Images of fire and of contrasting darkness pervade both *Paradise Lost* and *In Dubious Battle*.

Not only does Christian symbolism embody in the parallelism between the novel and its epic counterpart, but also it extends to some other aspects. For example, for a reader familiar with the Bible, it is easy for him to see Jim as a Christ figure, which is indicated in many striking details. The novel begins with Jim's rebirth, as he says when giving his reason for joining the Party, "I thought I might get alive again." Doc Burton, an educated physician who helps the Party during the strike, when seeing Jim with Lisa and the child, speaks of "the holy family". At the close of Chapter 13 roosters crow and Jim, injured and suffering, asks for water; while in the last chapter, Jim's face, luminous for

ecstasy, “ was transfigured, a furious light of energy seem to shine from it” (John, 1979:249). When he is killed, Jim does not have a chance to say “You don’t know what you’re doing”; he and Mac are ambushed and his face is blown off by a shotgun at close range, so that Mac finds him in a still kneeling posture and exclaims simply, “Oh, Christ!” Later Mac in his pep-talk acclaims, “This guy didn’t want nothing for himself---“ (John, 1979: 250). All these details fit Jim well into the imagery of a Christ theme.

There is also a general relationship between the strikers’ feelings and religious fervor. For example, neither Mac nor Jim admits any association with religious feeling, not understanding that the similarity is in emotional response rather than in any acceptance of doctrine. When, alight with enthusiasm over the strike, Jim talks to Doc, the latter says to him, “ You’ve got something in your eyes, Jim, something religious.” Jim furiously replies, “Well, it isn’t religious. I’ve got no use for religion,” and later, “I don’t believe in religion.” And Doc blames Jim of being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

The Christian Symbolism or allusions, though not so overt as in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, help convey, by way of implication, the theme of the novel, that is, the strike movement is actually a battle for freedom from the constraint of the fruit growers, just as the title indicates. Once again, in this classic piece of literature, Steinbeck impresses us with his skillful strategy of symbolism.



## Chapter IV Conclusion

In fact, a thorough reading of Steinbeck's works reveals that his fascination with the Bible is endless, and Jesus appears in his vocabulary frequently. Biblical symbolism and allusions interweave through almost all of his novels, with the Christian motifs sustaining and integrating the stories, not just in the four books chosen in this thesis, in which those symbolism and allusions are most evident.

His fictional works teem with representative figures of symbol, who more often than not stand for some abstract Christian ideas; Casy, Tom and Rosasharn in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Adam, Charles, Caleb, and Cathy in *East of Eden*, and Jim in *In Dubious Battle* are the clearest examples. Through these figures, coupled with the symbolic titles and characters' names, Steinbeck fuses his novels with a religious attitude, an attitude much different from the orthodox one.

Moreover, Steinbeck uses this particular artistic technique to develop structures and themes of many of his novels. Thus functionally, those symbolism and allusions serve as a moral and thematic foundation; while aesthetically, they are both evocative and prefigurative, evoking an anagogic imagination and providing a vantage point from which the reader may view the

primary action.

All in all, judging on artistic and technical terms, Steinbeck's literary exploration of the Bible should be seen as an integrative stylistic technique, as a part of a larger whole and a remarkably full aesthetics. This unique technique is but one of Steinbeck's skillful strategies he employs in his works, yet it itself is sufficient to make evident Steinbeck's value in the American literature.

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