The Philosophical Quest of Tom Joad in The Grapes of Wrath

Eun-Young Lim

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in English at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation
https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/282
No further reproduction or distribution of this copy is permitted by electronic transmission or any other means.

The user should review the copyright notice on the following scanned image(s) contained in the original work from which this electronic copy was made.

Section 108: United States Copyright Law

The copyright law of the United States [Title 17, United States Code] governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that use may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. No further reproduction and distribution of this copy is permitted by transmission or any other means.
THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

[Signature]

Author's Signature

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University NOT allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Author's Signature

Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.

http://www.eiu.edu/~graduate/forms/thesisreproductioncert.html

5/3/2007
The Philosophical Quest of Tom Joad
in The Grapes of Wrath

(TITLE)

BY
Eun-Young Lim

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2007

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE
When the merciless Dust Bowl sweeps through Oklahoma in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the major questions of what can be achieved by thinking and how can ordinary men overcome these critical circumstances pervade the entire novel. This thesis focuses on how Tom Joad, the protagonist in this novel, grows in his philosophical quest, based mainly on Steinbeck’s assertion that “Need is the stimulus to concept, concept to action.”

Although Tom Joad is portrayed as a cynical, convicted killer who responds to stimuli or from impulse at first, he undergoes his journey both literally and metaphorically from Oklahoma to the promised land of California with the migrants, thus he reveals his philosophical transformation, inspired by the former preacher Jim Casy. While Tom experiences the death of his grandparents and sees his family broken apart on this journey, he also assumes authority in and takes responsibility for the family.

Tom realizes further that the migrant workers’ working conditions and unfair wages are horrendous under unchecked capitalist greed. Sharing their common hardships and difficulties, he learns to embrace other families as his own and to cooperate with migrant workers for the sake of the group’s needs, signifying his spiritual growth from “I” to “We” and the potential of mass movements in labor organization. Tom dreams of a democracy that is governed by ordinary people. Serving as a peacekeeper in the Weedpatch Camp, Tom gradually defines, specifies and participates in his ideal of the world.

Eventually, Tom is so moved by Casy’s arrest in place of him and Casy’s murder that he kills a second time, but he does so to protect Casy rather than in self-defense as he
had earlier in the novel. Seeking refuge in his flight, Tom meditates in a cave implying
his rebirth as a hero of Emerson’s Oversoul, defined in Casy’s phrase as “all men got one
big soul ever’ body’s a part of.” Tom’s fully committed philosophical quest
continues his transformation, by suggestion, beyond the novel’s pages and to its ultimate
victory in the voice of the people.
Acknowledgements

I thank God for giving me His wisdom and strength to accomplish this goal.
I would like to thank Dr. Loudon for his superb insight and expertise in acting with
diligence as my thesis director. He has offered open and various approaches, solid
feedback and criticism by illuminating my knowledge of American literature and
philosophy. I would also like to thank Dr. Searle and Dr. Boswell for their ardent and
keen contributions as readers. Their excellent thoughts greatly improved the major points
of this work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Tom as Philosophical Protagonist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Tom as a Natural Man</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Tom as a Dispossessed Migrant</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Tom’s Growth in Perspective from “I” to “We”</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Tom’s Rising Leadership</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Tom’s Vision in the Weedpatch Camp</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Tom as Hero of the Oversoul</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: The Grapes of Victory</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction: Tom as Philosophical Protagonist**

Among the many literary works that John Steinbeck wrote, "*The Grapes of Wrath* is set entirely within the 1930s and is concerned with a distinctive condition of the depression. The novel is also a work of the 1930s in the sense that it is a product of Steinbeck’s artistic maturation during that decade" (Pizer 83). During the 1930s, Steinbeck was a very prolific writer, publishing *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937). Within two years of this diligent pursuit of craft, he had woven themes and strategies into what would become his many-faceted masterpiece.

Some characteristics about *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) can be explained: "there indeed are primitivist, Marxist, Christian, and scientific elements in *The Grapes of Wrath*. But no one of them is the single most dominant element and none is present in a single and obvious way. Rather, they exist in a fabric of complex interrelationship which constitutes both the power and permanence of *The Grapes of Wrath* as a naturalistic tragedy" (Pizer 86). Although many philosophies and ideas are found, analyzed and interpreted by the novel’s many literary critics, its fundamental message about human dignity and the unyielding creative power of the Oklahoma migrants remains central to the novel.

The following record as to how widely and popularly the novel was read is shown at some universities: "Librarians generally agreed that the circulation of *The Grapes of Wrath* was second only to that of *Gone With the Wind*, although three librarians reported equal circulation for the two books, and one (Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College) reported *The Grapes of Wrath* their most widely circulated volume" (Shockley
This fact shows that *The Grapes of Wrath* was widely known either as "a good book" or popular for raising controversial issues and offering grist for critical reputations.

There are some critics who insist that Steinbeck's novel is likely to have the tendency of a socialist novel: "Steinbeck is frequently identified as a proletarian writer of the nineteen thirties, one whose dominant interest lay in the social and political problems of the Great Depression" (Hunter 48). Peter Lisca, however, compliments Steinbeck, calling his novel "a brilliant achievement," (51) in order to correct the stereotypical views of its literary features: "To appreciate fully this accomplishment, it is important to keep in mind Steinbeck’s independence from the extensive literary and political proletarian movements of the period. He took no part in the organized efforts of writers, critics, and scholars to promote leftist or Communist theory as fulfillment of their responsibility to society; nor was he personally committed to any political viewpoint" (49). Though there exists some element of proletarian advocacy or a socialist image of oppression in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's main concern was more to nurture compassion toward humans and to express and to document his concern at gross injustice than to create any specific political propaganda. Therefore, it would be too narrowly conceived an approach if we were to read Steinbeck's novel as merely the expression of his socialist or political involvement.

Considering the historical background in the 1930s, America underwent the shift from an agrarian, rural economy to an industrial, urban society with two catastrophic events: the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. The first was an economic downturn that brought severe problems:
As the Great Crash of 1929 developed, over the next years, into a deep-seated national and world Depression, it grew quickly apparent that the social and cultural mood which dominated the Twenties was over for good. By 1931, as the banks and factories closed, farming collapsed, industrial plants worked to 12 percent of capacity, millions of unemployed walked the streets, and destitution, poverty, and pain were widespread.

(Bradbury 96)

Along with the Great Depression in the national economy, the Dust Bowl was also the horrible natural disaster that threatened the Midwest and Great Plains regions in America: "In addition to their serious damage to the soils, dust storms have brought tragedy and loss to human beings. They have destroyed lives; created discomfort and illness among thousands; killed livestock; made highways impassable; ruined motors; damaged the contents of stores, factories, and homes; buried orchards, fields, and gardens; and disrupted commercial production. They also have brought darkness in midday, and have spread mud-rains far and wide over the country" (Leighton 13). As this summary indicates, the damage was so tremendous that it seemed almost impossible for farmers to keep their old patterns of life.

When the merciless Dust Bowl sweeps through Oklahoma in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the land looks so dry, dessicated and desert-like that no life seems capable of surviving. In Chapter 1, we see the word *dust* as many as twenty-four times. In the midst of the disaster, most of the men have to think about how to overcome this life-threatening situation. What can be achieved by thinking, and how can the men make any breakthrough in these critical circumstances? Pondering these questions transformed the
victims: “After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant” (Steinbeck 7).

Steinbeck suggests that these “watching men” need to think to overcome the problems that they face. Carpenter quotes John Dewey’s idea, “Thinking is a kind of activity which we perform at specific need” (569), and Steinbeck applies this assertion to The Grapes of Wrath, “Need is the stimulus to concept, concept to action” (153). And the novel gives us a hint that, if they become whole, there would be some way to overcome even the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl: “Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole” (7).

Because of their duty to make themselves whole, “The men sat in the doorways of their houses; their hands were busy with sticks and little rocks. The men sat still—thinking—figuring” their way into action (8). Thus, Tom Joad’s appearance after his release from prison suggests an inevitable fulfillment of his destiny to act and to lead others into action as foreshadowed in this passage.

Tom is the central character in The Grapes of Wrath, although many critics may want to grant greater stature to Jim Casy because of his spiritual mentoring of Tom early in the novel than to Tom himself. There is considerable evidence, however, to argue that Tom is the central protagonist in this novel. Steinbeck’s biographer Benson discovers new facts about the naming of Tom. He “noticed the second part of the novel’s dedication, ‘To TOM who lived it’” (505). Tom Collins was “the manager of the Arvin Sanitary Camp,” and he “was a very unusual man who would provide a great deal of background information for Steinbeck about the migrants, their customs, speech, and behavior, and, at the same time, he also would make a considerable contribution to the
spirit of the novel, its attitudes and values” (506). Further, the biographer notes, “This was Steinbeck’s introduction to the man who became the most important single source for his novel” (507). Not only did Steinbeck have a source in Tom Collins from whom he draws background and context for his novel, but also Steinbeck honors Collins with his use of the name Tom for his major character. Benson adds that “Collins’s background was that of a man who had trained for a time for the priesthood and then quit to become a teacher” (507). Therefore, I suggest that Steinbeck portrays Tom as a philosophical, spiritual leader, although Tom Joad’s characterization and role in the novel are not exactly the same as Tom Collins’s in his job.
Chapter One: Tom as a Natural Man

Tom Joad, the protagonist in this novel, is regarded by critics as one of the “thinking” men. In his first appearance, however, he looks different from the image of a thinking man. Rather, he looks more natural and unsophisticated than a man given to intellectual inquiry. As his appearance is portrayed in Steinbeck’s introduction of his protagonist: “He was not over thirty. His eyes were very dark brown... His cheek bones were high and wide... The space between thumb and forefinger and the hams of his hands were shiny with callus” (9). Tom is a tough-looking and ordinary man, newly released from prison. Donald Pizer defines him from this appearance, “Tom is initially the symbol of ‘natural man’” (88). And, further, he notes his ability to act: “He is big and rawboned, is uncomfortable in store-bought clothes, and he can roll a cigarette or skin a rabbit expertly” (88). He looks somewhat proud, and he also responds according to stimuli or impulse. Furthermore, he seems to be alone because of his time in prison. According to Shaw, Tom “is quite literally alone when first introduced,” (618), and, also in an image of marginality, he is “a man walking along the edge of highway” (Steinbeck 9). Tom has just been paroled from McAlester prison, and, for this reason, he still needs time to adjust outside prison to the world from which he has been excluded. Tom must have defensive barriers which have isolated him, but, meaningfully, Tom is not embittered by the experience. He is, in fact, in inertia at this stage. However, definitely “Tom’s corporeal release foreshadows the spiritual emancipation he will soon experience” (Shaw 618), and his first meeting with the truck driver is really his first test to enter once again “the world.”
As a hitch hiker, Tom indulges in obligatory conversation with the truck driver. While Tom is informed about how the old farming methods are being replaced by tractors, the conversation turns into playful but suggestive banter between Tom and the truck driver. To the truck driver, Tom’s identity is merely that of a hitch-hiker, but Tom manipulates the conversation when it comes to the driver’s intrusive scrutiny of what kind of person Tom is like: “I seen your hands. Been swingin’ a pick or an ax or a sledge. That shines up your hands. I notice all stuff like that. Take a pride in it” (13). A bit of boasting about the life of truck driver or fulfilling his dream does not make a good impression on Tom: “A guy got to get ahead. Why, I’m thinkin’ of takin’ one of them correspondence school courses. Mechanical engineering. It’s easy. Just study a few easy lessons at home. I’m thinkin’ of it. Then I won’t drive no truck. Then I’ll tell other guys to drive trucks” (14). The driver’s one-sided monologue implying an easily achieved authority over ordinary workers undermines any genuine, mutual interaction between them.

While having the conversation, Tom drinks alcohol as if he were being rewarded for his incarceration and to dull the driver’s empty moralizing. For example, the truck driver does not want to touch alcohol, for it would restrain him from his proposed study. Tom’s drinking, however, is much more like depression or hopelessness than a celebration of his freedom: “I ain’t got a hell a lot further to go” (Steinbeck 15). During a short period of nervousness, Tom finally and reluctantly acknowledges his imprisonment: “You sure took a hell of a long time to get to it, buddy” (15), Tom replies to the driver’s none-tto—subtle uinsinuation. During his admission, Tom informs the truck driver that he was involved in “homicide,” and, at this point, he, by definition, is a criminal. Tom’s
declaration to the truck driver, however, gives us an impression of bragging rather than one of a shameful regret: “I killed a guy. Seven years. I’m sprung in four for keepin’ my nose clean” (16). Tom reaffirms that he is a social outcast at this point and identifies himself as a criminal before the driver does. Shaw points out, “Tom’s ride with the driver is predictably short, and after sharing only a few quick miles with him, Tom is back on the road alone, his first post-prison effort at human contact unsuccessful. His imminent meeting with Jim Casy will prove more rewarding” (Shaw 619). At least Tom shows his superiority in terms of the tug-of-war in conversation as he says, “Thanks for the lift,” signifying that he is “lifted” by outmaneuvering the driver’s hesitant interrogation.

**Tom’s Symbolic Similarities with the Turtle...**

In Chapter 3, Steinbeck describes a turtle throughout the whole chapter. “Like the turtle, Tom is admirable for his devotion to getting things done, his one-step-at-a time persistence” (Shaw 620). The turtle’s movement is slow, and it is vulnerable and in danger on the concrete road in “the burning hot” sun (19). It is helplessly exposed to being hit by any car passing by it. And, finally, a light truck hits the turtle intentionally. The turtle cannot make the speed like the truck does, and, also, it is not able to avoid the recklessly dashing vehicle:

And now a light truck approached, and, as it came near, the driver saw the turtle and swerved to hit it. His front wheel struck the edge of the shell, flipped the turtle like a tiddly-wink, spun it like a coin, and rolled it off the highway. The truck went back to its course along the right side. Lying on its back, the turtle
was tight in its shell for a long time. But at last its legs waved in the air, reaching for something to pull it over. The turtle entered a dust road and jerked itself along, drawing a wavy shallow trench in the dust with its shell.

(19)

Tom and the turtle have several traits in common. First, turtle has its own shell, and this enclosure suggests Tom’s literal imprisonment—and, symbolically, his own ego—before he moves on to the freedom of his own spiritual growth. Second, the turtle is very vulnerable outside of its shell, and so is Tom when he is just released from prison in terms of living the rest of life with the isolating stigma of being a convicted killer. Tom is hurt from his prison experience, discontented with his oppressed life of the past, and, for this fact, he knows that he will not be welcomed in the outside world. But there are strengths in his isolation as well. According to Burns, “the turtle will survive because it expends its energies totally in its self-interest” (101). Though the turtle becomes an object of disdain by a wantonly murderous truck driver, its never-yielding will to survive indicates that Tom remains strong and “turtle-like” in his ambitions. When Tom picks up the turtle, he is ready to face life coming toward him, no matter what it takes. This analogy portends the spiritual growth, the foundation, the sign of “the anlage of movement” of Tom (Steinbeck 18).

**Tom’s First Murder...**

When it comes to Tom’s nature, Jim Casy describes him thus: he “wasn’t mean but tough” (Steinbeck 45). Talking about his prison time for murder, Tom seems to brag about his act of murder rather than regret it: “I’d do what I done—again” (28), he
answers Casy. When asked if he is ashamed of it, Tom responds, “No, I ain’t” (28). He might have argued his murder as justifiable self-defense, but, at least in this moment, Tom shows no deep concern for the consequences that the murder would bring upon him. Prohibited from the company of women and limited to a slice of pork once a year for Christmas (32), Tom grasps almost intuitively how his freedom has been limited. Eating rabbit meat with Casy and Muley, Tom introduces the subject of his murder, starting with “We was drunk” (56). He goes on to suggest how hard it will be to keep his life going in the right direction.

He is aware subconsciously that men can think and act reasonably, but his rationale is confused by his experience in prison wherein people are treated inhumanely: “Men is supposed to think things out. Here they put me in, an’ keep me an’ feed me four years. That ought to either make me so I won’t do her again or else punish me so I’ll be afraid to do her again’ - he paused- ‘but if Herb or anybody else come for me, I’d do her again. Do her before I could figure her out. Specifically if I was drunk. That sort of senselessness kind a worries a man” (57). Tom Joad has learned in prison to mind his own business, to survive by his own wit and to live one day at a time: “Al saw the dark brooding eyes of his brother, and the prison calm, the smooth hard face trained to indicate nothing to a prison guard, neither resistance nor slavishness” (Steinbeck 87). As Tom puts it, noted by the critic Peter Lisca, “I’m just puttin’ one foot in front a the other,’ and later ‘I climb fences when I got fences to climb’” (59).

Meanwhile, others considered him a great hero because of his murder. His brother Al suspects that Tom has accomplished some great heroic action in order to gain his freedom. Reed says that “Tom’s crime is not shameful, but honored by Al” (86). Al
excitedly asks Tom with curiosity, “Did—did you bust out? Of jail?” (Steinbeck 87).

When Al hears Tom say that he is paroled, however, Al’s fantasy about Tom’s power is diminished. Therefore, Tom cannot be considered to be engaging senselessly in bravado in this context, for he is enmeshed in his own version of survival-of-the-fittest ethos.

**Jim Casy’s Influence on Tom...**

Tom’s encounter with Jim Casy unfolds naturally in the barren Oklahoma landscape that, in turn, exudes its own parched condition and need for growth in order to survive. This encounter is very significant because Tom’s ideas and eventual spiritual growth are influenced by Casy. Critic Patrick Shaw also asserts that “When Tom meets Casy, he forms the first ties that will eventually cause him to move from a surly isolate to a selfless prophet” (619). Casy notices Tom instantly because, when he was a preacher, he had baptized Tom. Consequently, the first conversation about baptism indicates that Casy is a spiritual mentor to Tom. As Casy and Tom exchange their experiences with women, “their manners and conversation are a peculiar combination of vulgarity and elevation” (Reed 605). Casy’s recollection of his time spent preaching is a seemingly weird synthesis of evangelistic evocation and deceitful seduction: “I use ta get the people jumpin’ an’ talkin’ in tongues, an’ glory shoutin’ till they just fell down an’ passed out. An’ some I’d baptize to bring ’em to. An’ then—you know what I’d do? I’d take one of them girls out in the grass, an’ I’d lay with her. Done it ever’ time” (24). Casy sees himself as “a damned ol’ hypocrite” (24). And Tom is familiar with this “strategy” of “revival,” saying, “There ain’t nothing like a good hot meetin’ for pushin’ ’em over” (24). But their primary—if inarticulate—concerns are more to seek a spiritual solution to the
dismal condition of the land and the people than to confine natural desire within the
deceit of conversion.

Recollecting what he has done as a preacher, Casy is in distress because of his
presumed betrayal of the Holy Spirit that he once used to clarify his fundamental anguish
over his ambiguity toward his own faith. He knows that he has exploited women by
using his spiritual authority to deceive them. Troubled by the guilt and shame of his
hypocritical misconduct as a preacher, his ministry cannot be sustained.

Casy justifies his “dark night of the soul” by achieving an understanding of
religion on his way back to land, family and community—and, eventually, humanity
itself—that echoes Emerson’s transcendentalist philosophy. He also, like Emerson,
acknowledges: “I can’t be a preacher no more” (26). His refusal to embrace prior,
narrow judgments grounded in categorical concepts of good and evil approaches
Emerson’s rejection of conventional Christianity in his “Divinity School Adress.” Jim
Casy, too, refuses to accept orthodox versions of Christianity: “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” (26). For Casy’s coming life, his practice of faith will become not only
increasingly “secular,” but also deeply humanistic and spiritual in his compassionate,
ultimate sacrifice of his life itself. What can be more Christ-like than the sacrifice of
one’s life for others?

Casy, too, affirms his own version of Emerson’s doctrine of the Oversoul: “Why
do we got to hang it 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” (27). Warren French, one of Steinbeck’s most prominent and early critical advocates, sees that “Casy has already meditated upon the idea of a brotherhood of all men before the story begins, but he cannot formulate clearly his concept” (27), but, in this moment of speculation, Casy recalls, he delineates his idea in relatively explicit language. As Carpenter observes, “Because Casy has ceased to be an orthodox minister and no longer uses big words, Tom Joad plays around with him” (564). Tom half-heartedly responds: “You give her a goin’-over,” and “You figured her out” (26).

Tom cannot grasp this idea at first with his narrow Christian piety, for Christian devotion to him has been framed by obedience to rules and by presumed ecstasy in reward for conformity: it should evoke euphoria in people through jumping and yelling with excitement in response to “inspired” preaching and, in the manner of “tent-meeting” revivals in the Oklahoma of the time, it should do so through admonishment. Tom is not infatuated by Casy’s idea at the beginning. This idea of “one big soul” is, however, handed down to Tom through Casy’s earthy reflections and his exemplary action, although it has not yet emerged explicitly in Tom Joad’s own conscious beliefs. One critic’s succinct summary of this point of view regarding Casy is that “Jim Casy translates American philosophy into words of one syllable, and the Joads translate it into action” (Carpenter 563), and Tom, as the representative of the Joads, gradually receives it, word by word, syllable by syllable. Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it this way in his “...Address”: “To aim to convert a man by miracles, is a profanation of the soul. A true conversion, a true Christ, is now, as always, to be made, by the reception of beautiful sentiments” (74). Tom’s response to Casy’s “sentiment” does not rely on Tom’s grasp
of difficult doctrine and theological discourse, but, at the very least, it does suggest that Tom comes to acknowledge "the thinking man" Casy as his spiritual mentor.

Casy's transcendentalist perspective, however, unravels rather ambiguously because he does not deny the existence of sin. Casy, later in the novel, tells Uncle John who is always anguished by his guilt for his wife's death: "Sure I got sins. Ever'body got sins. A sin is somepin you ain't sure about. Them people that's sure about ever'thing an' ain't got no sin—well, with that kind a son-of-a-bitch, if I was God, I'd kick their ass right outa heaven! I couldn't stand 'em!" (224). Nevertheless, Casy keeps stepping to his own drumbeat, his own manifestation of transcendentalism. Casy does not seek to impose his doctrine on Tom. As Emerson's definition suggests, Casy's "translation" and transmission of "the big soul" to Tom comes through their mutual "sentiments" of land, family and humanity, of respect, justice and dignity.

Casy is not dependent on supernatural miracles for his survival. He is dependent on a journey across the land, an acceptance into a family and a recognition of his love for humanity. He depends on the acts of his mentored student. Tom, assuming that all the family has to leave, readily welcomes him in earnest warmth as a companion with his family: "You think you're coming along, Casy?" (59). Tom seems to feel intuitively that he needs a man, a man with "a big soul," who has this much insight for his family's survival. His invitation to Casy to join the family, "to be family," is Emerson's invitation of the Oversoul, an invitation into both divinity and humanity as indistinct from one another.
Chapter Two: Tom as a Dispossessed Migrant

Tom returns to his home and to his family only to find it ruined and torn apart. As Tom’s imprisonment indicates, “During his absence, he had almost no contact with his family” (McKay 673). His mother and grandmother, however, had sent him a Christmas card. Tom remembers being teased by some inmates in the cell who saw the card. Although the card was picked up out of ignorance by Tom’s grandma, having lost her glasses and thus having never read it, the episode provokes the inmates to call Tom “Jesus Meek” (29), foreshadowing in irony the path that Tom would pursue to become “Jesus Strong.” Tom also tells Casy that his family is not fond of talk in written form: “They wasn’t people to write. Pa could write, but he wouldn’. Didn’t like to. It give him the shivers to write. He could work out a catalog order as good as the nex’ fella, but he wouldn’ write no letters just for ducks” (45). Despite this lack of communication with his family that resulted in no actual letters for the fours years of his incarceration, Tom’s reminiscence of life before prison—about events that happened at his home and about the personalities of his family members—comes alive vividly in his mind as he reports to Casy. As Caldwell puts it, “to further illustrate the strength of the life force, Tom recalls how Uncle John, when he wanted a pig, wanted a whole pig, and ate until he was gorged” (107). Unfortunately, however, this passion for living does not exist any more, for Uncle John or for any of the Joads. When Tom comes back to his home with Casy, he recognizes something wrong and quite different from the time that he left home and his neighbors.
In the past, the Joads lived an agrarian life, simply depending on the cycle of nature’s farming: “The Joads are close to the natural processes and rhythms of life. They are farmers who have always farmed and hunted. They have little education and little association with town or city. Their unit of social life is the family with its ‘natural’ crests of birth, puberty, and marriage at one end of life, and aging and death at the other” (Pizer 86). They are honest in their relationship to the land, so the land has been integral in shaping them. They do not expect to profit from farming, for they hope only to gain life-sustaining crops as the reward for their efforts. The mode of the farmers’ lives, however, has had to change, so to speak. Uprooted and pushed off their land by tractors, such as the destruction witnessed by the half-insane Muley Graves, Tom’s family has lost its place through Grandpa’s weak resistance and his unlettered incapacity to understand its need in the face of the corporate takeovers.

The Joads fall behind as sharecroppers with the old methods of farming: “It is a mobile era in which one must accommodate to the mass mechanization in order to survive. Farmers can no longer hope to get by with a team and a wagon” (Griffin and Freedman 118-19). According to John J. Condor, “In the case of the Oklahomans, the indictment is founded on a fundamental irony: societies, designed to protect men from nature’s destructive features—here a drought—complete nature’s destructive work, expelling men from the dust bowl into which nature’s drought has temporarily transformed their farms” (626-27). Drought and greedy bankers evict them regardless of their own will: “Like the Israelites, the Joads are a homeless and persecuted people. They, too, flee from oppression, wander through a wilderness of hardships, seeking their
own Promised Land” (Shockley 91). The Joads do not have any protection or safeguards from their long-adjustment to agricultural society, so even nature betrays them this time.

**Preparations for Tom’s Journey into Conscience...**

In the middle of preparing to leave the Oklahoma land, Tom gets easily involved in the work with his family. The family kills the remaining pigs as if in a ritual ceremony before the long journey begins. And the family meeting shows their kinship to confirm and to keep the family unit solidly together. Through these small but significant activities, Tom broadens his awareness that his family signifies the importance of belonging to a sense of humanity greater than himself.

As the novel contains many Old Testament allusions, the Joads are twelve members like Israel’s twelve tribes, excluding Casy. Though the family members are few for the group, they become the foundation of extending their humanity to a larger context—that of the migrating Okies. The Joads and their neighbors choose the road of dreams, taking Route 66 to pursue greener pastures westward to California. They hold the dream of prosperity in their hearts: to live in abundance without struggling. Like Tom’s grandpa says, “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” (95). As the biblical symbol indicates, “Grapes are fruitfulness, renewal, and of promise. The Israelite spies into the land of Canaan carried back a bunch of grapes so large that two men had to carry it on a staff between them, firm proof of the productivity of the land to which God has led His Children” (Crockett 108). This sincere eagerness for the riches of the land represents all the migrants’ wishes. The Joads, of necessity, must shift from “farmer to migrant,
from 'I' to 'we,' from family to group" during this journey (Condor 627). While the Joads map their journey along Route 66 geographically, their minds also track and endure the growth of the collective spirit of humanity.

**To Counter the Tractor with Being Human...**

One of the reasons for the tragedy of the migrants is the rise of mechanistic farming in contrast to the needs of human beings and in dominance of human struggle. Manual laborers can no longer compete with the speed of the mechanized farm implements. The machine should, however, be used for the purpose of fulfilling humanistic values. But Steinbeck observes the exact opposite taking place:

Pa borrowed money from the bank, and now the bank wants the land. The land company—that's the bank when it has land—wants tractors, not families on the land. Is a tractor bad? Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong? If this tractor were ours, it would be good—not mine, but ours. If our tractor turned the long furrows of the land, it would be good. Not my land, but ours. We could love that tractor then as we have loved this land when it was ours. But this tractor does two things—it turns the land and turns us off the land. There is little difference between this tractor and a tank. The people are driven, intimated, hurt by both. We must think about this.

(Steinbeck 152)

The tractors personify the igniting of human selfishness. If tractors are used for building community into a sense of "we," then their functions are desirable. The humans, however, who use the machines put their priority on profits first; then, the process in
pursuit of individual wealth is so swift and the tractors' sweep of human hopes and dreams so thorough that the land can yield little hope for "a family farm," much less sustain the dreams of an agrarian community. Therefore, the responsibility for the abuse of mechanistic power symbolized by the tractors is the human propensity for greed, not the modernistic, mechanical invention of the tractors themselves.

Despite the Joads' oppression under hard-working struggles with deteriorating natural conditions, they do not yield to despair: the very idea of the land seems to sustain them. Steinbeck's antidote to greed is an affirmation of human potential that follows:

This you may say of men—when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophers, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back... Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while the bombers live—for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died. And fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live—for every little beaten strike is proof that the step is being taken. And this you can know—fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.

(Steinbeck 151-52)

Steinbeck claims here that "Manself," individual ego and action in service of a larger humanity, never fails under any attack or changes commitment when threatened or even seemingly defeated, no matter what the prevailing philosophy or the conventional
ideology. The idea breeds acts, but the most important moment is when the idea never
dies because of an act. Rather, if there is any concept that would propel Manself forward,
and that would evoke the motivation for the Joads, and those in similar marginal lives, to
pursue their own human dignity and rights, then the movement toward human community
never recedes as long as the Manself lives. This characteristic of selfless persistence in
the face of seemingly impossible obstacles is the only element that makes Manself
distinctive in the universe. Moreover, the following concept of becoming “whole” retains
this idea, albeit emphatic in a fundamental biological metaphor for the growth of human
community, as an unchanging belief in the unity of the Mansel:

I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am
bewildered... This is the zygote. For here “I lost my land” is changed; a cell
is split and from its splitting grows the thing you...[who hate change and fear
revolution...]... hate—“We lost our land.” The danger is here, for two men
are not as lonely and perplexed as one. The baby has a cold. Here, take this
blanket. It’s wool. It was my mother’s blanket—take it for the baby. This is
the thing to bomb. This is beginning—from “I” to “we.”

(152)

This persistent generosity of spirit in harmonious struggle and of deed in mutual need is
the life that the Oklahoma migrants seek through their journey west, and this idea of
Manself unifying both ideal and action is the power that Tom Joad will witness as it both
explodes around him and ignites within him when it is most needed.
Chapter Three: Tom’s Growth in Perspective from “I” to “We”

Learning from Cooperation...

The first movement from “I” to “We” in Oklahoma is introduced by Casy joining with the Joads by offering his spiritual leadership. Tom’s open mind—indeed, he invites Casy to join them—initiates this movement first by adopting the “We” principle. Later, during their exodus, Grandpa’s death in the Wilsons’ tent awakens Tom from his world of petty ego. Tom learns what cooperation and hospitality are from the Wilsons’ generosity toward the Joads. They share their own tent without hesitation to let the dying grandfather in: “He loaned his tent” (140), and “Sairy” Wilson helps lay out grandpa. An old person like Grandpa needs a place to meet death as comfortably as possible, certainly not on the road but in a place as much like home as possible. Although the tent is temporary and shabby, it functions like a great refuge for the Joads. The Wilsons’ willingness to give up their residence to the Joads gives a new perspective on human relationships to Tom.

Accordingly, Tom seeks some way to survive for both families. The car is the absolute necessity of means to move from one place to another for the migrants. And the Wilsons’ car is broken, and they are in the middle of the road, not knowing how to fix it. Tom’s idea is momentous to both families:

“We got a overload, but Mr. an’ Mis’ Wilson ain’t. If some of us folks could ride with them an’ take some a their light stuff in the truck, we wouldn’t break no springs an’ we could git up hills. An’ me an’ Al both know about a car, so
we could keep that a car a-rollin’. We’d keep together on the road an’ it’d be good for ever’body.”

(Steinbeck 149)

The embracing idea of “keeping [people] together” is pivotal to Tom in breaking his stereotype of having compassion solely for his own family. Moreover, Tom worries more about the safety of others on the trip, demonstrating concern for the rest of the family by insisting that Al and he could ride on the broken car. Tom aspires to overcome his own insularity of compassion that has been previously devoted only to his own kin, to blood-ties within his own family. Mutually, the Wilsons and the Joads see themselves as an extended family unit, although this perception is not derived from blood relationships between the two families. Tom’s confident decision in the critical situation is the avenue by which he manifests the idea of Manself unifying both ideal and action; his action must fulfill mutual need. He learns, so to speak, what his “call” is, or, as Emerson puts it: “Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him...Every man has this call of the power to do something unique, and no man has any other call” (153). Tom’s recognition of this call emerges from his love for the group. Carpenter comments that “Steinbeck now emphasizes the group above the individual and from an impersonal point of view” (566) and this movement to collective consciousness, precipitated by Tom, is the major power to survive and to endure for the Oklahoma migrants.

The great flood of humanity westward in flight from the severe drought behind them comes to comprise a great sense of humanity: “In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families of home became one family, the children were the children
of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream” (Steinbeck 194). In the light of ordinary, rural family structure, this enhanced family “kinship” might look unusual. The migrants, however, realize and accept this “new” family in the process of adjusting to survival in their new perilous environment. They know their common concerns as well. They have the same purpose and the same dream to cement common elements among them, despite a tentative existence: “Every night a world created, complete with furniture—friends made and enemies established; ...and every morning the world torn down like a circus” (194). They define their own rights through their own leaders, making their own laws, codes and punishments to establish decent standards for human society in accordance with the demands of survival in their own rapidly changing world. They are not like a mob without order or without respect for others’ rights to live. For example, in Hooverville, Ma cooks stew for her family, but, when she sees hungry children gathering around her, she cannot ignore them. Despite the little portion and even though there is not enough food for her own family, she gives some of the stew to the children, and the Joad family never complains, not even with a single sarcastic comment about this generosity. Apparently, Tom fills his empty stomach by eating little more than a spoonful of stew, but he must learn this generosity is beyond merely a single act of charity to the children. This generosity must be offered from the individual’s consistent awareness of the need for the spirit of self-sacrifice.

**Learning from Communal Celebration**

The life of the migrants is confined to the effort to meet only basic needs like seeking one’s daily bread. What do they hope that the future brings them? Plenty of job
offers in the face of uncertain employment, a warm winter in light of barely adequate shelter and good educational opportunities for their children are the common dreams for which they yearn and for which they are anxious to see in reality. The migrants, rather than succumb to hopelessness, join their hearts and hopes in music to create communal joy beyond their routine conversation. They ease their weary minds and their tired bodies in a celebratory manner hard to convey in ordinary dialogue on jobs, weather and children:

And perhaps a man brought out his guitar to the front of his tent. And he sat on a box to play, and everyone in the camp moved slowly in toward him, drawn in toward him. Many men can chord a guitar, but perhaps this man was a picker. There you have something—the deep chords beating, beating, while the melody runs on the strings like little footsteps. Heavy, hard fingers marching on the frets. The man played and the people moved slowly in on him until the circle was close and tight, and then he sang “Ten-Cent Cotton and Forty-Cent Meat.” And the circle sang softly with him and he sang “Why Do You Cut Your Hair, Girls?” And the circle sang... He sang the “McAlester Blues” and then, to make up for it to the older people, he sang “Jesus Calls Me to His Side.”

(Steinbeck 199-200)

They commune with one another through music. They use instruments such as the harmonica, guitar and violin that are easy to carry and that are easy to learn, given the generous spirit of those around them who are willing to share their own skills. Anything in their hands can express the migrant workers’ joys and sighs at the same time. With the
simplicity of the blue note and the gospel’s moan, the touching melody and poignant lyrics are enough to draw them together into a sustaining community.

Mingling openly without hostility and without strangeness appeals to each person from the young generation to the old. Because the migrants create their own culture, they can shape the adjustments required of their new lives: “The families moved westward, and the technique of building the worlds improved so that the people could be safe in their worlds…” (195). They need new methods to live through the challenges on the road where the environment and social conditions are totally different from what they have known before: “Thus they changed their social life—changed as in the whole universe only man can change. They were not farm men any more, but migrant men” (196). This capacity for change that arises from communal consciousness shows the enduring strength of their unity; otherwise, they would fall apart. They use their heads and their hearts to care for one another as if they were one family. Their fellowship through music affirms an emotional kinship in the face of an unknown future. As one of the migrants, Tom finds these experiences invigorating of and stimulating for his spiritual growth.

**Learning from Ordeals and Reality in Hooverville…**

Tom realizes that the movement of migrants is taking place nationwide: “They is a whole country movin’. We’re movin’ too” (174). For the Joads, this rush of humanity from degradation, displacement and dispossession to California evokes the archetypal “promised land” inscribed in American history as California, from the Gold Rush era of Emerson’s time to the emergent Hollywood of Steinbeck’s own time. Unfortunately, California’s hollow fantasy starts from the “orange handbill” (148), advertising that
produce pickers are needed, with which the Joads, the Wilsons and other people have also been lured by implications of easy wealth and lots of it. This handbill is mere propaganda from California owners and growers but disguised in bright orange, implying wealth can be picked readily from trees like gold, as nearly a century earlier, it could be picked easily from the ground. The ragged man’s testimony, however, definitely reveals the despair behind the lies: “Somepin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me” (191). The Joads hope the rumor of false promises is itself false, but reality comes ever closer with every mile further west. Tom, shortly after the Joads’ arrival in Needles, deduces from its appearance that this “promised land” may have little “milk and honey”: “Never seen such tough mountains. This here’s a murder country. This here’s the bones of a country. Wonder if we’ll ever get in a place where folks can live ‘thout fightin’ hard scrabble an’ rocks. I seen pitchers of a country flat an’ green, an’ with little houses like Ma says, white. Ma got her heart set on a white house. Get to thinkin’ they ain’t no such country. I seen pitchers like that” (204). Perhaps Tom has the capacity to see what a “real California,” albeit far beyond his present class status, can bring to them, but, as the novel progresses, Tom grasps the cruel irony of a prosperous paradise that depends on poor pickers’ exploited labor and that lies behind the illusion.

Tom, still growing as “the thinking man” in Manself, keeps gathering information on the family’s journey, eventually, to Hooverville, especially after experiencing the less benign labor camps elsewhere. According to the young man who he meets shortly after the Joads’ mock baptism in the Colorado River, the workers are not welcome to vote on any aspect of their lives; the owners control them by keeping them moving. They cannot
get public relief services, and they are not permitted to organize in order to bargain for fair wages for their labor. The migrant workers are always watched, and they are controlled under police scrutiny, even prevented from job opportunities by the “blacklist” of labor organizers.

Tom sees readily enough that California “ain’t no lan’ of milk an’ honey like the preachers say” (251). Prior bad reports about “the promised land” of California seem all too much the reality. Therefore, unlike their dreams and expectations, the Joads and the other Oklahoma migrants are greeted only with hatred, suspicion and contempt. California residents, both those who would exploit them and those who fear the low-wage competition for jobs, seem incapable of extending even basic if condescending pity. Nobody welcomes them: “You ain’t in your country now. You’re in California, an’ we don’t want you goddamn Okies settlin’ down” (213-14). Even worse, they are called “Okies,” which no longer means “you was from Oklahoma,” but now means “a dirty son-of-a-bitch” (205). They have to endure this humiliation as well as the arduous journey and the “promise,” now, of miserable living conditions.

Land owners, of course, hold them in contempt, even as they anticipate higher profits from low-paid laborers, but the working people also hate “Okies” because Okies, desperate for work to survive, have to work for the lowest pay. Consequently, California workers cannot improve their own earning power by asking for higher wages of the land owners. The Oklahoma migrants cannot settle for a moment at the same place because it is so difficult to find any but temporary jobs, or, as one older man tells the Joads, there is “no steady work” (206). Moreover, the migrants have to bear consistent hostile threats of violence from the Californians: “If they settle for a moment,
they are soon driven off by hunger or pick handles. And if they complain or protest, they are reds or agitators or dangerous vagrants, and the police and the mobs are eager for violence” (Bowden 17). Even after arriving at the relative “luxury” of the government-sponsored camp, Hooverville, a deputy threatens them, saying, “Board of Health says we got to clean out this camp [Hooverville]. An’ if it gets around that you got reds out here—why , somebody might git hurt” (264).

The Oklahoma migrants, however, show a vital kinship not only with each other, but also with the land itself. Their tenacity in persevering through the unending hard work on a hard land in the legacy that was Oklahoma has now become the love for the new land, promising a ground for their rising sense of community. Pa, Tom and Casy find it nearly incomprehensible that “a newspaper fella [an allusion to Randolph Hearst and his legendary wealth at the time] near the coast [could own] a million acres—” (Steinbeck 206). Ownership of land has been for the Joads and others more a matter of guardianship for the sake of family, community and land rather than the power of investment and speculation. More important than owning land for Tom is “working it,” growing life from it for the use of sustaining life. Tom, then, like Emerson, sees nature as the ground of both the cultivated and the wild, of both farming and hunting, and of both culture and necessity. Tom’s inherent humanistic values constitute his perspective on the land and its uses. In sharp contrast, the “landowners in California had lost their passion for the earth” (Reed 606), and “all their love was thinned with money, and all their fierceness dribbled away in interest until they were no longer farmers at all” (Steinbeck 231). Furthermore, the landowners do not regard the migrant farmers as human beings: they are but only a single machine producing their ever-expanding profit.
In *Their Blood is Strong* (1936), Steinbeck vividly reports that “it is California which has and needs the majority of these workers. There are at least 150,000 homeless migrants wandering up and down the state” (54). Further, and foreshadowing the novel that would eventually grow out of Steinbeck’s work as a free-lance journalist covering the “new immigration crisis,” he claims: “The migrants are hated for the following reasons, that they are ignorant and dirty people, that they are carriers of disease, that they increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling in a community, and that, if they are allowed to organize, they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season’s crops. They are never received into a community or into the life of a community” (55). In this sense, the Oklahoma migrants, represented by the derogatory term *Okies*, are regarded and treated as lower than human beings or, at least, treated as expendable human beings, far more so, than, say, an expensive race horse. Their value in being human is, apparently, of no use to many Californians. They can always be replaced like parts in a machine.

Steinbeck also further documents the fragile legal status that the Oklahomans must endure: “The migrant is always partially unemployed. The nature of his occupation makes his work seasonal. At the same time the nature of his work makes him ineligible for relief. The basis for receiving most of the relief is residence” (75). The migrants live in the miserable era of the Great Depression from the onset of the novel, and now they encounter a country that does not give them more “legal residence” than inadequate, temporary shelter for “temporary people.” Steinbeck’s Okies, however, show genuine affection toward the life of community and an unflagging commitment to loving each other while content with few, very few, possessions. The example of “newspaper fella”
Randolph Hearst symbolizes that great wealth and lavish possessions themselves do not bring satisfaction in life. The owner who identifies himself with his possessions is always fearful that somebody will take his possessions away, that someone will steal from him, leaving an empty human being, much like, in this context, he might be inclined to dismiss the humanity of the migrant worker.

But, if people have fun with their own loving and if they can inscribe, however humbly, that loving in storytelling, then even the recollection of intense joy and suffering can bring them happiness regardless of how much they might possess. Tom recalls how his grandpa had fun: “Grampa wasn’t scairt. When Grampa was havin’ the most fun, he come cloest to getting’ kil’t. Time Grampa an’ another fella whanged into a bunch of Navajo in the night. They was havin’ the time a their life, an’ same time you wouldn’ give a gopher for their chance” (206). This anecdote is simple, but Tom conveys the profound message in any human being’s life, implying that Okies would never surrender to the challenge of life’s struggles. Casy’s insight into the attitude of the rich toward their possessions is inspirational:

“If he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it ’cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, there ain’t no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an’ maybe he’s disappointed that nothin’ he can do’ll make him feel rich—not rich like Mis’ Wilson was when she give her tent when Grampa died.”

(Steinbeck 207)

The “have’s” and the “have-not’s” cannot be standardized in a conventional context here: This act of generosity from Sarah Wilson, literally, giving one’s own home to another, is
a far superior status of humanity—and intentionally exaggerated in Steinbeck’s symbolic action here—to that defined by people who define themselves with their material possessions. Being content is more valuable than the power of wealth and the volume of possessions. The vanity of wealth cannot fill one’s heart and cannot be comparable to the fullness of a giving heart.

In Hooverville, the working conditions beyond the camp are miserable for and degrading to the Okies. With the ridiculous—even then—rate of a dollar for ten hours of picking up peaches, Okies are manipulated by the law of supply and demand in a free market economy. Elstor points out capitalism’s cruel practice by using Marxist ideology: “The clearest statement is perhaps in the *Theories of Surplus-Value*... The capitalist is the direct exploiter of the workers, not only the direct appropriator, but the direct creator of *surplus-labour [sic]*” (374). And he adds further that Marx’s charges against capitalism can be summarized on three counts: “First, it is *inhuman*, by leading to the alienation of men from their specie’s powers. Sometimes alienation means not only lack of self-realization, but lack of consciousness of this lack [of self-awareness and of self-actualization—the Manself]” (515). Elstor continues, “Next, Marx believed capitalism to be a profoundly *unjust* system. The central principle is that each should receive proportionately to his contribution, assuming his ability to contribute [is as equal as the next person’s ability to contribute]” (516). Further, he asserts: “The capitalist wants to minimize paid labour [sic] time, not to minimize labour time *tout court*” (517). Powerless in terms of being hired workers without capital to increase their own property and, hence, without choice in accepting minimal pay for maximum work hours, the migrants cannot escape the inhumane and unjust institution of unregulated capitalism.
Casy Saves Tom’s Life...

Casy saves Tom’s life when Tom is involved in the case of Floyd Knowles’s fight with the deputy. The first point to notice, however, is that Tom’s decisive action to prevent a deputy sheriff from shooting Floyd Knowles is the pivotal moment in which he shifts from the “I” perspective to that of “We,” in the sense that he joins the fight against the deputy who charges Floyd with agitation but without foundation and without evidence. Since Tom breaks his parole obligations and would be in danger of being traced and identified by his fingerprints, Casy’s willing, sacrificial arrest is significant for the rest of Tom’s life. His status as a parolee places him in danger of violating the law, and, if apprehended, he could be returned to prison; so Casy voluntarily takes the blame instead of Tom: “Casy shouldn’ of did it. I might of knew, though. He was talkin’ how he ain’t done nothin’ for us. He’s a funny fella, Al. All the time thinkin’” (271). Tom thinks of Casy’s arrest as merely a sacrificial act to help his family. Nevertheless, Casy’s action is more than just to be arrested in order to spare Tom from further incarceration.

Casy’s act seems to be regarded as somewhat useless in Tom’s view because Tom has already been named a criminal, so, even if Tom were to be arrested again, it would not make any difference in Tom’s mind. But Casy knows that, if Tom is put in prison again, then the whole family’s survival will be in question since Tom plays a major role in sustaining his family. Casy’s thought, his own assertion of Manself, reveals itself in the action to save Tom and his family; furthermore, Casy’s selfless act extends and preserves human dignity by keeping the deputy from shooting other people, having already shot one woman who is bleeding and needs medical attention. Consequently, far from merely an impulsive act to save Tom’s “name,” this act represents a watershed
event on which Tom can contemplate the sacrificial substitute of one’s life for that of another, perhaps coming to realize it as “the largest step toward disciplining the powers of the people” (Reed 613). Casy’s action implies the moral humanism of Steinbeck with Emerson’s transcendentalism behind it: ”Every man has this call of the power to do something unique, and no man has any other call” (153). Even more important an impact on the novel’s development than sparing Tom from prison for parole violations, Casy’s act, in a sense, catapults Tom’s rudimentary movement forward with his exemplary demonstration of the idea of “We” made manifest in action.
Chapter Four: Tom’s Rising Leadership

A New Leader Emerges...

Long before Casy’s act is a model of leadership, Tom, who bears the same name as his father Old Tom Joad, emerges as the leader of his family. A little after Tom appears in the novel after his release from prison, Steinbeck ceases to refer to his father with the name, Old Tom Joad, and, thereafter, the author uses only the name Pa, shifting the reader into Tom’s point of view. One notable incident in Tom’s emergent leadership is the death of Grampa. Tom’s statement about the reason to bury his Grampa not only keeps Grampa from being disgraced by the police who might seek the identity of Grampa and who might well coerce his burial in an anonymous public graveyard, but also it foreshadows Tom as the future father figure: “This here is William James Joad, dyed of stroke, old old man. His fokes bured him becaws they got no money to pay for funerls. Nobody kilt him. Jus a stroke an he dyed” (143-44). Tom is the spokesperson on behalf of his family, and he wants people to know that they are so poor that they have to bury grandpa in a roadside grave; but their family tradition is peaceful in its necessary resourcefulness, and, obedient to nature’s demands and used to its devastation, they console themselves without shame. The old generations have passed in front of an emerging new leader, Tom. Although Tom seems to have little concern for his family at times, he shows a gradual but genuine, sincere concern for it, signifying that he is gradually becoming altruistic. When Al returns to pick up the broken engine parts, having left the family at a private, half-dollar-a-day camp, Tom asks him insistently, “where’d ya leave ‘em?” (175). When Al decides later to pursue mechanic’s work alone,
Tom asks, “An’ leave the fambly?” (261). In contrast to Al, Tom reaffirms his responsibility to live with the family and his leadership to sustain it.

Once the decision is made to leave Hooverville after he has to hide from police, Tom brings his family—including the stubborn Uncle John and the despondent Rosasharn—together. The critic Condor claims that as an individual, Tom at this point in the novel, has two selves: “One is his social self and the other is what is best called a species self” (633). Beginning with his family, Tom’s “social self” develops steadily as the family has moved from place to place before “settling” in Hooverville. Because he has to run from potential prosecution and a return to prison, he knows he must leave his family. Tom suggests that his family pick cotton in a new location for its safety and sustenance. In this sense, Tom’s “social self” begins to bud, and he realizes that any self-confining selfishness, even in the nurturing presence of the family and even with all he might provide for it, would destroy himself and the family as well.

In some sense, Tom is a leader in the mold of Moses. He kills a man before he leads his family; he actively starts to lead and to protect his family on the road before he becomes independent. Also, Tom instills pride within his people (the Oklahoma migrants). For example, Tom meets a one-eyed man who does not have self-esteem due to his loss. Tom points out sharply, even crudely, his physical disability, yet, at the same time, Tom encourages the one-eyed man to consider his good eye and the rest of his capacity by juxtaposing the man’s loss with “a one-legged whore” and “a humpback” who, in contrast to the man, take advantage of their weaknesses. Tom encourages him to be self-reliant and to resist self-inflicted damage, both emotionally and physically. Like Emerson suggests, Tom knows how to put himself in the situation with empathy: “Place
yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it
floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment.
Then you put all the gainsayers in the wrong. Then you are the world, the measure of
right, of truth, of beauty” (“Spiritual Laws” 153). Therefore, Tom can become
instrumental in pressing for the rights of migrants. By using his leadership, he centers
himself in his family and in the migrants’ lives of struggle against inhumanity and
injustice. Tom, Steinbeck seems to suggest, and all those “ordinary” leaders like him are
now in the center of the struggle, no longer relegated to reactions from the margin.

Conflicts within Tom’s Nature...

Tom has a divided mind in that his conformity with institutionalized life behind
bars conflicts with his instinctual and natural self. When Ma asks if Tom has a grudge
against somebody in prison, she is afraid that Tom will accidentally get into trouble again.
Tom’s answer implies that he is not one to be involved in some incident that might cause
an uproar: “‘All the time in stir I kep’ away from stuff like that. I ain’t so mad’” (78).
During his imprisoned life, he learns what the conformity is like. He is aware that
conformity is a virtue in an institution of confinement: “You can’t go thinkin’ when
you’re gonna be out. You’d go nuts. You got to think about that day, an’ then the nex’
day, about the ball game Sat’dy. That’s what you got to do” (93). Tom figures out how
hard it is for him to act without his will being controlled by authorities in the prison
system. And this oppressing and agonizing moment of realization tempts him to act
impulsively with an affirmation of his own will: “I figgered I was gonna lay aroun’ an’
get up late an’ eat a lot when I come home. I was goin’ out an’ dance, an’ I was gonna go
tomcattin’—an’ here I ain’t had time to do none of them things” (176). His candid confession straightforwardly shows how Tom’s life would be different if he had not met Casy again and had he not participated in the migrants’ struggles. Emerson, again, says in his essay “Spiritual Laws,” and he might as well be addressing Tom: “Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment. Then you put all the gainsayers in the wrong. Then you are the world, the measure of right, of truth, of beauty” (153). Despite Tom’s difficulty in overcoming a life where conformity ensured survival, he does not regret his allegiance with the labor movement. Although Tom’s choice to participate in the larger family’s struggle requires him to give up both his habits of conformity and his impulses toward self-gratification, his decision is crucial for the progress of his philosophical quest. He learns to identify not with his “species self” but with his “social self,” and he learns that his instinctual reaction for self-preservation through either conformity or indulgence pales besides his natural affinity for humanity larger than his family or himself.

From Broken Family to the Family of Man...

On the way to California, Grampa dies with a stroke. This event marks the onset of the disintegration of the dispossessed, poor farm family. The firstborn Noah gives up his journey with the family, seeing California disappear right before his eyes as he strikes out to follow the river south to an unknown destination and a solitary future (208). Granma also dies while crossing the desert. Connie, who thinks all the time but fails to act in any interest but his own, abandons the pregnant Rose of Sharon (268). As
Carpenter puts it, “The tragedy of *The Grapes of Wrath* consists in the breakup of the family. But the new moral of this novel is that the love of all people—if it be unselfish—may even supersede the love of family” (568). Reasonably, then, Tom overcomes this identity solely with his family in order to extend his philosophical growth to identify with the larger “family” of migrants, despite his internal emotional turmoil from heartbreaking experiences.

Ma’s dependence more on Tom than on other family members for leadership is very clear and confident: “They’s some folks that’s just theirself an’ nothing more. There’ Al—he’s jus’t a young fella after a girl. You wasn’t never like that, Tom” (353). As if she needs to convince her son of his emerging role further, she adds, “Ever’thing you do is more’n you. When they sent you up to prison I knowed it. You’re spoke for” (353). Supported by Ma, Tom’s anticipated leadership is firmly established early in the novel. Lisca says that “…Tom Joad… beginning with his baptism by Casy, is given the attributes of a Christ figure. … Once when he seems to be rebelling against his emerging role and says he wants to ‘go out like Al…get mad like Pa…drunk like Uncle John,’ his mother shakes her head” (61). However much Ma’s expectation and anticipation of Tom’s growth as a leader might be, his leadership is Tom’s own choice once he is involved in resisting the abuse of migrants by the police who raid the labor organizers. Long before this scene, however, Tom has been gathering his lessons, somewhat unconsciously, that will steadily nurture, if slowly and subtly, his firm commitment to leadership.

When the migrants face hardship, the men’s courage seems to diminish, and they are in danger of losing their will to live. For example, after Grampa dies, “Pa squatted
down on the ground. Noah and Tom and Al squatted” (140). Unlike the others who squat in dejection, Tom’s attitude is optimistic, admitting that the death of his grandparents is from natural causes as much as from the consequences of dispossession. And Tom’s parents, too, testify to his spiritual growth. When Granma dies, Pa says “Here’s Tommy talkin’ like a growed-up man, talkin’ like a preacher almos’” (229). Ma, also, adds proudly, “He is. Tommy’s growed way up—way up so I can’t get aholt of ‘im sometimes” (230). As his parents notice, Tom becomes independent early on from his parents’ protection, finding hope in accepting what cannot be changed, developing the will to persevere, shaping a reservoir of strength within from his acquired survival skills in prison. Tom may not be aware of how deeply that he grows philosophically through experiencing Grandpa’s and Grandma’s deaths, but he does understand that natural death is an ongoing, inevitable process in the cycle of generations while death as a consequence of dispossession and exploitation is far from a necessity of progress.

When the proprietor at the roadside campground does not allow the Joads to camp unless they pay half a dollar, Tom’s anger appears not because the Joads don’t have enough money to pay for it, but because human dignity is disregarded: “It’s a hard thing to be named bum” (188). He sees that people with power refuse to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of the poor and refuse to embrace the powerless in their common aspirations of economic security: “On’y I wisht they was some way to make her ‘thout takin’ her away from somebody else” (188). He knows the needs of owners and investors, but he knows those needs cannot justify exploitation, however petty or brutal it may be. Further, Tom cannot endure the abusive power exercised by the police: “Burnin’ the camp ain’t the law” (279). Witnessing the police’s wanton attacks on behalf of the
owners and those politicians bribed by them and the police’s inclination to subvert any justice for the pickers in their abuse of power, Tom comes to realize that he must awaken the innocent victims of injustice.

Tom’s growth as a leader, however, does not always unfurl smoothly. Tom fears his limitations as a leader and suffers some skepticism. When Casy asks Tom what will happen if the migrants cannot get jobs in California, Tom cannot answer the question: ‘How’d I know? I’m jus’ puttin’ one foot in front a the other. I done it at Mac for four years, jus’ marchin’ in cell an’ out cell an’ in mess an’ out mess. Jesus Christ, I thought it’d be somepin different when I come out! Couldn’t think a nothin’ in there, else you go stir happy, an’ now can’t think a nothin’’” (174). Since Tom is not a philosophical thinker by nature, his underdeveloped mind seems frequently overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges which he must confront. Howard Levant interprets Tom’s difficulty as well:

His moral development follows Casy’s, with the significant difference that his is the more difficult to achieve. Casy is a relatively simple character; he can express moral concern easily. Tom’s emotional numbness following his time in prison does not permit mediation or cancel personality, so the awakening of his moral consciousness on the road is a more rigorous, more painful experience than Casy’s time in the desert.

(113-14)

While on the road, Tom’s strength grows as he learns to face more everyday trouble than he has ever had to solve. Tom’s philosophical maturity grows along with the family and other migrants during the journey. “Tom Joad is a complex figure, and it is possible to
see in him also sufficient attributes (a specific act of violence, for example) to identify him as a type of Moses who will lead his people to a better future, or the apostle Paul, particularly in the specific details of his conversion" (Lisca 62).

Tom’s Pragmatism...

While Casy is an experienced preacher who grounds his appeal in didactic delivery to evoke his “conversions” among the congregations at his tent revivals, Tom is a pragmatist who responds to the need of the moment. He has his own opinion about what the preaching should be like. While Casy claims his preaching should be “tellin’ folks stuff,” Tom’s observation about preaching rests in the integrity of the preacher himself, in his assumption of the dignity of others and in, simply, being good: “Preachin’s a kinda tone a voice, an’ preachin’s a way a lookin’ at things. Preaching’s bein’ good to folks when they wanna kill ya for it” (96). Though he is not a preacher, his keen desire to capture the moment of decisive action is recognizable. His interpretation of preaching is more concrete and pragmatic than abstract and dogmatic.

In another instance, Tom is not willing to accept silently the situation as it is dismissed in denial. Tom must respond to the question “what’s it comin to?” (128), from the fat man who is pumping their gasoline. When the fat man asks, seeing only the mass of migrants in motion to an uncertain future rather than the suffering of human beings, Tom, agitated by the man’s near-sighted perception, tells him that he has to act, implying that seeking to know is necessary action, if he is to grasp the migration of these thousands passing by: “Well, you ain’t never gonna know. Casy tries to tell ya an’ you jest ast the same thing over. They folks dyin’ all aroun’. You don’t want to know nothin’. Just sing
yourself to sleep with a song—"What we comin’ to?" Tom’s substitution of the word we here for the fat man’s use of the word it redirects the reader’s perspective from the vague sense of an “Okie problem” to the individual lives of real human beings whose suffering is also very real. His harsh and blunt rebuke of the fat man shows that Tom does not want to yield to the status quo of ignorant indifference but, instead, has the courage to face the facts.

Tom’s homespun pragmatism holds when he is in danger. Because Tom is a parolee, he is alert in taking extra precaution to obey the law when he crosses the State line. Unlike Ma Joad’s concern, knowing her son is already in violation of parole, Tom is not hesitant to cross the line with firm resolve, saying, “Tha’s better’n stickin’ aroun’ Sallisaw an’ starvin’ to death” (135). This positive attitude underlies his pragmatic philosophy. Another example is Tom’s declaration himself as a subversive thinker: “I’m bolsheviky” (193). One cannot tell to what degree that Tom has knowledge of capitalist or socialist ideology behind his declaration, but its connotation implies that he expresses the migrants’ need for fair working conditions and just wages; he wants to be treated with dignity and recognized as a more important voice than that of merely a trouble maker.

In the Weedpatch camp, Tom and other workers discuss “the reds” with the curiosity: “A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we’re paying’ twenty-five!” says Mr. Hines. Timothy says, “I ain’t a son-of-a-bitch, but if that’s what a red is—why, I want thirty cents an hour. Ever’body does. Hell, Mr. Hines, we’re all reds” (298). And Tom responds, “Me too, I guess” (298). If Tom thinks that agitation for fair wages is helpful to benefit his family, he accepts being called “a red.” Perception, ideology and even condemnation are beside the point when real need requires
pragmatic solutions. The urgent and desperate matter for Tom, at this point, is how to survive in a situation where people worry about food on a daily basis. Therefore, he relies more on the need to act than on the need to justify that action, saying, “Prayer never brought in no side-meat. Takes a shoat to bring in pork” (250). Tom’s pragmatic observation here, rather than evoking a doctrine of salvation through grace as passive recipients of generosity, as “victims” of an unjust “system,” affirms the need for the migrants to act on their own behalf and in their own interest, thus advocating a doctrine of salvation through acts: one must act in order to save not only one’s own self, but also one must act in the interest of others—generosity depends on sharing “the shoat.”
Chapter Five: Tom’s Vision in the Weedpatch Camp

The Weedpatch Camp is first introduced to Ma by a girl who used to live in the camp. The girl’s testimony is precisely summarized:

“Over by Weedpatch. Got nice toilets an’ baths, an’ you kin wash clothes in a tub, an’ they’ water right handy, good drinkin’ water’ an’ nights the folks play music an’ Sat’dy night they give a dance. Oh, you never seen anything so nice. Got a place for kids to play, an’ them toilets with paper. Pull down a little jigger an’ the water comes right in the toilet, an’ they ain’t no cops let to come look in your tent any time they want, an’ the fella runs the camp is so polite, comes a-visitin’ an’ talks an’ ain’t high an’ mighty. I wisht we could go live there again.”

(Steinbeck 253)

The government camp sounds appealing enough to Tom’s family that it takes the report as good news and moves there. What they find is not all that different from what they have already known but, at least, the camp is equipped with some “modern facilities.” To Tom, the most magnetic element that he discovers is that common men can rule the camp. Tom finds out that governing committees are composed of ordinary men, not the police:

“You mean to say the fellas that runs the camp is jus’ fellas—campin’ here?” (287). That the migrants themselves constitute authority seems incredulous: “You mean to say they ain’t no fat-ass cops?” (287). This idea strikes him with such novelty that he imagines that this camp might be the ideal place for him: “Why ain’t more places like this?” (288).
And a watchman’s answer provokes Tom to think about democracy not only at this moment, but also later: “You’ll have to find that out yourself” (288).

This notion of self-discovery as an aspect of their own power is the motif that Tom uses to keep thinking about the way to retain this idea as central to his own growth. What Tom pursues is a common people’s democracy, such as that associated with Walt Whitman’s poem “En Masse,” although Tom does not clearly configure the abstraction in nearly as much detail with nearly the range of “representative” persons as Whitman does in his poetry. In the camp, Tom recognizes that basic principles in maintaining the facilities revolve around common sharing and mutual respect of one another’s needs. Here in the camp, each individual watches out not to damage facilities that are also for other people’s use. With a little sacrifice from individuals, the greater purpose of the group’s survival, security and relative comfort can be achieved in this camp.

The growers’ association does not like the government camps because their “deputies” cannot get inside to monitor the labor organizers or to manipulate the migrants’ “labor market.” Moreover, people in the camps are getting used to being treated like human beings. The critic Reed notes, “Steinbeck praises the government camps because they encourage dignity, pride, and decency. The Hoovervilles and company camps make men feel debased” (612). As Pa said, “Down that gov’ment camp we wasn’ mean” (403). Therefore, as Pizer observes, “The government camp, as an island in a hostile sea, is maintained on the principle of the surrender of some individual rights for the greater good of the whole” (91). The idea of the “whole” of humanity, however, is defined and extended by implying that it embraces all reality as a
transcendent concept similar to Emerson’s Oversoul. In Steinbeck’s *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, he echoes earlier American idealistic thought in scientific diction:

The whole is necessarily everything, the whole world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective, life and death, macrocosm and microcosm (the greatest quanta here, the greatest synapse between these two), conscious and unconscious, subject and object.

The whole picture is portrayed by *is*, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of *being*.

(Steinbeck 150-51)

This idea acknowledges no division between great and small. The whole is, in itself, the ultimate good. The concept of “whole” in the Weedpatch Camp here, however, does not lie exclusively in this holistic idea, but rather in each individual’s self-reliance and mutual cooperation. Tom is in transition from being an unconscious part of the whole (humanity) to participating consciously in the whole of “being.”

Tom experiences another precious example of cooperation in the camp. Tom’s association with Floyd Knowles in the Hooverville camp is his extension of himself to find another friend. In other words, Tom widens his social contract from concern specifically with family members to non-family members, thus increasing his empathy with the larger group of migrants by his working relationship with the Wallaces.

Timothy Wallace lets Tom know that there is a job where he works. Tom, at first, cannot understand such a seemingly selfless offer: “Why in hell you gonna git me on? I’ll make it shorter. What you cuttin’ your own throat for?” (293). As Warren French sees it, “The
first significant change in the family’s attitude occurs in the Weedpatch government camp where the Wallaces share their work with Tom, although they may thereby cut their own meager earnings” (29). Tom realizes later that the strength of migrant people is their concern for each other—without greed, implying the potential for camaraderie, and out of common need for common purpose. They could be enemies of each other in the intensive competition to work, but they cannot do so and still show respect to and offer dignity to each other. To Tom, this cooperation is an eye-opening experience; he sees little to suggest that conditions would lead neighbors to embrace neighbors. They are not "others" any more but the "we" of "the people," and Tom figures out that this intangible power is the strength underlying hope among the Oklahoma migrants. The relatively comfortable atmosphere of the government’s camp with the spirit of “We’re all a-workin’ together” (357) stands in remarkable contrast to the ruthless competitive atmosphere at the Hooper Ranch.

Surprisingly, to some perhaps, in the constant struggle to find even minimal work at atrociously minimal salaries, the migrants seize any opportunity to enjoy their leisure time, such as at the dance. This momentary relief is one of the few ways for them to forget their sorrows and to permit them to feel that they participate in the recreational, courting rituals of ordinary human social engagements. Tom, though only for a little while, serves as a peacekeeping committee member with the duty to keep order at the Saturday night dance party. He learns leadership here in that he helps keep “intruders” (actually, agents hired by the growers) from trapping people in the camp with an intentional provocation that, in turn, would provoke and justify further repression of the migrants—and, worse, would feed the perception of the migrants as an ungovernable,
violent people to be “controlled” by any means at hand, including the power of the State. He comes to know how to protect people and how important it is to keep order. By joining the process of governance as a committee member, Tom broadens his contact and his concern with the group beyond his family.

Ditsky positively views the camp: “in realistic terms, Utopia was the government camp, already glimpsed as the token of what might have been” (663). Though Tom does not have concrete form of the ideal world, he does think of this camp as something of an utopia. Because Tom has experienced how horrible and miserable their lives were in Hooverville, he will not return to it: “I was scairt I’d kill somebody... Was only there a little while, but I was a-stewin’ around the whole time. Depity come in an’ picked up a frien’, jus’ because he talked outa turn. I was jus’ stewin’ all the time” (357). One of the reasons that he likes the government camp is that there cannot be police intervention unless the migrants make trouble in the camp. Tom recollects how he comes to have a grudge toward the police:

“Use’ ta work there in McAlester an’ think all the things I’d do. I’d go in a straight line way to hell an’ gone lay for ’im. Guess that’s what makes me mad at cops. Looked like a pig. Had a brother out west, they said. Use’ ta get fellas paroled to his brother, an’ then they had to work for nothin’. If they raised a stink, they’d get sent back for breakin’ parole. That’s what the fellers said.”

(Steinbeck 366)

Tom’s discontentment is reasonable. If the police act according only to the law, Tom will not be irritated by them. Tom, however, watches one instance of corruption after
another, and he experiences firsthand the police’s contemptuous action toward himself and other people. Tom’s knowledge of law enforcement is predominantly the ironic, lawless misuse of police power beyond their authority. Indeed, Tom seems unaware that, had he had adequate legal representation in his trial, he might well have been acquitted of manslaughter on the grounds of self-defense. Nothing in Tom’s experience, until the Weedpatch vision of participatory democracy in action and Tom’s engagement with it, suggests a legal system in which the poor and the dispossessed have equal justice. In other words, he imagines the ideal place to be like Weedpatch Camp where no police violence, even to disrupt the dancing party, a proletarian symbol of civilized culture, is possible.

Meanwhile, Steinbeck wants readers to link this superficial manifestation of police violence to that greater violence that lies behind it. The capitalists manipulate the innocence of even nature’s crops as well as the labor of those who harvest them to make greater profits for their own sake: “Behind the fruitfulness are men of understanding and knowledge and skill, men who experiment with seed, endlessly developing the techniques for greater crops of plants whose roots will resist the million enemies of the earth” (346). Their calculating purposes and actions consider migrant workers, hours worked, quantities harvested and wages paid as a mere set of numbers in the equations of profit: the calculus of suffering escapes them. The following indictment suggests the depth of Steinbeck’s outrage and represents circumstances in which the migrants can only watch, bearing witness to crimes against both nature and humanity:

There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our
success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from oranges. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot.

(348-49)

Therefore, “In the souls of the people, the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage” (348-49). If the crime that Tom commits is to harm one person and lands Tom in jail, then this crime destroys numerous people, yet there is no punishment of the Californian landowners. The fantasy of the American Dream in California is shattered by the hostile treatment of and by the inhumane and horrible working conditions with which the Oklahoma migrants must cope. This disillusionment might confine them in their tragic sadness, but this sadness that causes their anger to ferment, given Tom’s leadership, has its remedy in action.
Chapter Six: Tom as Hero of the Oversoul

The labor strike is the primary tool of resistance for migrant workers to claim fair wages in *The Grapes of Wrath*. For the first time, Tom has an opportunity to think about the capitalistic system of maximum profits and minimum overhead when “the young man” explains how the mechanism of wages and the number of migrant workers oppresses them. Peach-orchard owners scatter handbills everywhere and gather more workers than they need in order to pay absurdly low wages. Tom learns that the length of the harvest season is important, saying, “Them peaches got to pick up right now, don’t they? Jus’ when they’re ripe?” He goes on to propose the idea of a strike: “Well, s’pose them people got together an’ says, ‘Let ’em rot.’ Wouldn’ be long ’fore the price went up, by God!” (246). His idea is not systematically organized very well, but he knows that, when people raise the same voice in solidarity, then their number will work for them. Also, Tom learns about the power of the strike when Willie, Jule and he have a conversation regarding the limits of authority for “the law.” Willie explains why the owners’ “deputies” cannot exercise their power in the Weedpatch Camp:

“I’ll tell ya. It’s ’cause we’re all a-workin’ together. Deity can’t pick on one fella in this camp. He’s pickin’ on the whole darn camp. An’ he don’t dare. All we got to do is give a yell an’ they’s two hundred men out. Fella organizin’ for the union was a-talkin’ out on the road. He says we could do that any place. Jus’ stick together. They ain’t raisin’ hell with no two hundred men. They’re pickin’ on one man.”

(Steinbeck 357)
Although this idea of organized resistance causes disorder in the larger society, the idea of “all a-workin’ together” is the foundation of a humane, just society working together for the greater good of all citizens in the society, and Tom grows increasingly aware of this concept of “the whole.” He further discovers this idea from Casy in more concrete form than the conversation above permits.

Tom happens to meet a striker who turns out to be Casy who has been working at Hooper ranch ever since they parted in Hooverville. At Hooper Ranch, Tom and his family are to begin a job picking peaches. With the strict standard under the inspection of no bruised peaches from windfall, their earnings fall too short to buy even food. Tom sees how hard the work is: “I got a nickel. On’y got to do that there twenty times for a dollar” (371). When Tom meets Casy, however, Casy and his company are paid only two and a half cents a box rather than five cents, which is the equivalent of one ton of peaches. Due to his strike, Tom’s family could get paid five cents a box. Casy is transformed from an anguished preacher into a strike leader for working people.

Now Casy’s preaching becomes grounded in the social gospel. Ironically, he finds strength in jail that he fails to find in revelation from heaven for his tormented soul in the desert. Casy realizes that basic need rather than insatiable greed is what makes the trouble that lands them all in jail. And when people in the jail yell to make their demands heard, then their need is fulfilled:

“Well, they was nice fellas, ya see. What made ’em bad was they needed stuff. An’ I begin to see, then. It’s need that makes all the trouble. I ain’t got it worked out. Well, one day they give us some beans that was sour. One fella started yellin’, an’ nothin’ happened. He yelled his head off. Trusty come
along an’ looked in an’ went on. Then another fella yelled. Well, sir, then we all got yellin’. And we all got on the same tone, an’ I tell ya, it jus’ seemed like that tank bulged an’ give and swelled up. By God! Then somepin happened! They come a-runnin’, and they give us some other stuff to eat—give it to us.”

(Steinbeck 382)

But Tom still cannot understand what the strike means when Casy asks him, “Ya see?” Moreover, Tom will not agree with Casy’s request for his family to strike. Tom cannot easily give up his family’s unstable benefits, meager as they are: “We was outa food. Tonight we had meat. Not much, but we had it. Think Pa’s gonna give up his meat on account a other fellas? An’ Rosasharn oughta get milk. Think Ma’s gonna wanta starve that baby jus’ cause a bunch a fellas is yellin’ outside a gate?” (384). For now, Tom’s attitude toward a strike is quite reserved.

However, for Casy, the strike is his means to fulfill his mission to the low-paid workers; evoking both the American and the French Revolutions, he reveals that he is: “Doin’ it’ cause [I] have to…” (384). French argues that Casy’s learning is integral to his belief, saying, “When Casy finally figures out in a California jail what he does believe, he explains his ideas in the form of a parable that illustrates the benefits of unified action” (27). Ironically, Casy’s revelation comes upon him in jail. Once, earlier in the novel, Tom asks if Casy has ever been in jail. Because Casy has never been in jail, he does not understand when Tom says that “When you’re in jail- you get to kinda-sensin’ stuff” (251). This inverted situation, Tom’s intuitive hunch, from his own experience of incarceration, echoes now through Casy’s deliberations. Once Tom’s mentor, Casy is
now mentored by Tom. Casy experiences living in jail like Tom, and he finally realizes that the truth is to be found by “sensin’” it among people close at hand, not wandering in the desert apart from people. Having perceived this truth of desperate need being met by unified action, Casy has reason—his own salvation—to act for justice on behalf of working people.

The most important event in Tom’s transformation from an “I” to “We” concept is Casy’s death. Changing only outwardly in his role from a preacher to that of a strike leader, Casy fights for the workers who get ridiculously low wages. Unfortunately, Casy dies in an attack by the strikebreakers. His death not only opens the gates for Tom to follow his mission, even at the risk of his death like that of Casy’s, but also allows him to learn the love of men. The value that Casy leaves behind after his death is to strive for social justice based on participatory democracy of the people. With his efforts to approach and to define more realistic ways of nurturing social justice than preaching to working people, Casy’s mission as both preacher and labor organizer ends. His philosophy and his sacrifice, however, have a great impact on Tom. This legacy is the revelation that Tom associates with his own inkling of divine force and the enduring one that Tom will carry within him. Tom’s final crucial transformation from a merely natural if good man to a spiritual leader seems echoed in Emerson’s essay “The Over-Soul”: “We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term Revelation. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind” (168). Tom inherits this “soul force” from Casy, and Casy’s legacy will now be Tom’s as well. After Casy’s
death, Tom consciously and voluntarily accepts Casy’s concept of the brotherhood of all men “a-workin together” for the promise of a future for working people.

While Tom’s first murder is induced by his instinct for self-preservation, itself clouded from drinking, his second is pure revenge for the killing of Casy: “Almost glumly, with little expression of personal felling, he does not only what is expected of him but more besides. A peak in his development occurs when, in the manner of a classic brother-in-arms,” he must avenge his “brother’s” death (Lutwack 69). Tom immediately kills the strikebreaker who has killed Casy while seeking the reward for “the wanted” Casy:

Tom looked down at the preacher. The light crossed the heavy man’s legs and the white new pick handle. Tom leaped silently. He wrenched the club free. The first time he knew he had missed and struck a shoulder, but the second time his crushing blow found the head, and as the heavy man sank down, three more blows found his head.

(Steinbeck 386)

Until the last minute, Casy is preacher and mentor to Tom. Therefore, Tom’s second murder can be regarded as an act of justice against injustice and the protection of human dignity. The critic Shaw highlights Tom’s second murder thus: “The paramount distinction between these two killings is that Tom’s motive has shifted from mere self-preservation or ego-demand to the preservation of others and their ideas. This is the essence of Steinbeck’s pragmatic humanism: to do what one must do, but for the right
reasons" (622). Instead of a drunken, instinctual reaction, even if in self-defense, as in Tom’s first murder, what matters here is Tom’s intent to kill Casy’s killer, thereby, symbolically, killing the unenlightened conscience that leads a man to make himself into a bestial killer out of his perception that other men, the Oklahoma migrants, are beasts in their very demand to be seen and to be treated as human beings.

Tom’s killing of the man at the ranch means a family crisis not only in terms of his fleeing from the ranch, but also in that it becomes a turning point for Tom to shift roles from individual, self-reliant head of the family to an unselfish labor leader. He realizes that his family’s work will harm the other migrants: “What we was a-doin’ was breakin’ strike. They give them fellas two an’ a half cents” (390), and the wage difference does not matter only to the amount of money earned, but the difference can also bring devastating starvation to the striking migrants.

After Tom fled from the second murder, he, as a badly battered hero (Lutwack 75), washes his wounds, signifying the baptisinal direction of the newborn child. Now, he goes back to the natural environment, in hiding with Ma’s help at first: “Trail and stream swung to the left and then to the right again until they neared the highway. In the gray starlight she could see the embankment and the black round hole of the culvert where she always left Tom’s food” (415). Tom is alienated again from the world like he used to be in prison; however, this moment is more significant in the sense that, having been “reborn,” through an avenging violent act of justice rather than in an easy affirmation of
new-found salvation, he necessarily has to have a certain period of time in which to mature into his new being:

In a few moments the thicket crept to life again. The field mice moved cautiously over the leaves. A skunk padded heavily and unself-consciously down the trail, carrying a faint effluvium with him. And then a wind stirred the willows delicately, as though it tested them, and a shower of golden leaves coasted down to the ground. Suddenly a gust boiled in and racked the trees, and a cricking downpour of leaves fell. Ma could feel them on hair and on her shoulders. Over the sky a plump black cloud moved, erasing the start... The wind blew past and left the thicket quiet, but the rushing of the trees went on down the stream. From back at the camp came the thin penetrating tone of a violin feeling about for a tune.

(Steinbeck 415)

Nature gives the hint that some mysterious sign of life is about to take place, and, indeed, hand and ear begin to give new expression to hope, as rain to dry land, in the notes that drift faintly from the camp. Fed with food by his mother and living in a dark place in a cave, Tom’s “womb” is of the earth, symbolic of his continuing rebirth as a larger being than he had ever been.

A few days later, after he’s gone into hiding, when he meets Ma in the dark cave, his unshakable determination is complete. Tom affirms his spiritual, new life, begun in irony as a fugitive. In the cave, Tom’s meditation directs him to choose what he is going to do. Though he has little food and lives in the confined and dark space, his spirit is enlightened, and his spirit is in sublime harmony with both the divine force and the whole
of humanity. Tom’s quest moves rapidly toward a much wider concern and extends his philosophical vision. Tom hopes to express how his vision is conceptualized:

“Guess who I been thinkin’ about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me. But now I been thinkin’ what he said, an’ I can remember—all of it. 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 ain’t no good, ’cause his little piece of a soul wasn’t no good ’less it was with the rest, an’ was whole…I know now a fella ain’t no good alone.”

(Steinbeck 418)

Without doubt, Emerson’s concept of the Oversoul works well as a conceptual springboard in understanding Tom’s philosophy that he is “a little piece of a great big soul” and in grasping his spiritual growth as dependent on being “with the rest” of the people in:

…that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends and aims to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty…

(Emerson 163-64)
Such power and virtue in the Oversoul permeate each individual, as Tom now accepts, and, through human unity of action, becomes infinite.

This moment is the climax of Tom’s philosophical growth. Unlike his gradual maturation throughout the series of events in the novel, this moment is Tom’s great leap. Emerson, too, sees the soul’s development in terms of birth rather than linear progression: “The soul’s advances are not made by gradation, such as can be represented by motion in a straight line; but rather by ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphosis, from the egg to the worm, from the worm to the fly” (“The Over-Soul” 166). Tom’s rapid growth is possible, however, because his gradual movement from place to place, from person to person, has been a fitful act and reflects a series of meditations in themselves. The significant point is that his philosophy does not remain as a stagnant, correct dogma, a self-confining orthodoxy in which belief is all that matters: belief must develop into action. Perhaps Tom waits only for Ma’s question, “What you aimin’ to do?” (418). His manifest belief to serve people through action is firm:

I’ve been thinkin’ how it was in that gov’ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an’ if they was a fight they fixed it theirselves; an’ they wasn’t no cops wagglin’ their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a wonderin’ why we can’t do that all over. Throw out the cops that ain’t our people. All work together for our own thing—all farm our own lan’.”

(418)

He must feel the conflict between what he has idealized and what he has actually experienced while he meditates in the cave. He remembers the verses of scripture from Ecclesiastes that Casy once told him, and he recites it to himself: “Two are better than
one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 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” (418). His spiritual leap is moving toward integrating his prior religious experience into his will to act now. When Tom had inscribed this scripture in his mind is unknown. But he must have internalized unconsciously the value of human cooperation, for his conscious decision to act has now given meaning to his earlier belief.

As Casy puts it, the one big soul cannot be perfect unless a piece of each soul is united in the whole. This transcendentalist, noble thought inspires and defines Tom’s philosophical quest:

Then I’ll be around in the dark. I’ll be everywhere – wherever you look. Wherever they fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. If Casy knewed, 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 houses they build–why, I’ll be there.”

(Steinbeck 419)

Tom does not wish to stay in his safe cave; he does not seek refuge because he does not want to escape to save only his own life. He has to leave because he does not want to harm his family: “I can’t go puttin’ this on you folks” (392). In suggestions of immortality, Steinbeck renders the characterization of Tom into the utter embodiment of Manself at home in the Oversoul. Tom becomes an invisible, omnipresent being wherever there is a fight for social justice.

At first, Ma does not conceptualize what Tom’s intentions mean. However, she accepts the consequence of the new ideas expressed by her transformed son, although it
requires splitting the family. The new era needs new order. The Joad family must become part of the larger “family” of oppressed peoples wherever they may be. From Ma’s point of view, Tom’s departure into the unknown destinations of his flight and his fight are like Jesus ascending into heaven to leave the Holy Spirit with his disciples; she knows intuitively that his work will benefit both the family and the other migrants.

Warren French’s critical assessment of Tom’s transformation runs along the same line: “Cooperation can be achieved only when individuals of their own volition put aside special interests and work together to achieve a common purpose” (31). Not all criticism offers its assent to this position. According to Shaw, “Some accuse Steinbeck of making a puppet of Tom, making him jump in and assume Casy’s transcendentalist mantle without any preliminary structural or artistic design” (624). But Tom is not the Jesus puppet of either critics or Ma’s conventional Christian framework: in utter antithesis to the crucifixion, Tom acts in extreme affirmation of social justice, killing, not dying, in his belief. Every challenge that Tom overcomes, every action that he takes, and every word that he speaks foreshadow his last transformation.

Throughout the novel, Tom and the migrants’ use of language is crude and ungrammatical, as Steinbeck transcribes his characters’ use of dialect. Lisca mentions Steinbeck’s unusual technique in moving his dialogue beyond the confines of characterization: “The colorful folk idiom and figurative language used by the Joads, Wilsons, Wainwrights, and other migrants reappear in the dramatizations of the interchapters as the language also of the generalized characters” (52). Conversations among characters are shown always with quotation marks—except those in the interchapters wherein, like Tom’s characterization shifts to the embodiment of principle,
ordinary, even unlettered, speech transforms itself into principle. According to Donald E. Hall, language usage considered in the New Criticism’s close reading of a text can be applied to even this uniquely wrought regional dialect:

Underlying even the most politically charged contemporary analysis is the recognition that literature’s unique impact is the result of powerful, evocative language presented in ways that reference cultural traditions and that often follow time-tested mechanisms for eliciting certain audience responses. To look only at the implications of what is said explicitly in a text without looking at how it is said is to miss a significant aspect of a text’s meaning.

(17)

Tom and the migrants’ dialect sounds uneducated, unsophisticated and unrefined. However, it evokes not only a sense of principle plainly stated from within readers, but it also enables readers to feel a more genuine empathy with both the illusion of an authentic presence of the migrant characters and the hardship, thus, of real people in real conditions of real suffering. Steinbeck’s skillful use of dialect creates an “authenticity” of both fiction and historical condition for his readers. For example, Tom’s leadership would not impress readers credibly, if he were to use standard diction, grammar and spelling. Tom’s language illuminates a common call to readers that common people themselves, like him, even with his criminal past, can be leaders. Therefore, in The Grapes of Wrath, how the language is used is more significant than any reading of it that reduces the novel to sociological journalism.

Perhaps somewhat narrowly but nonetheless useful, the critic Crockett alludes to that common unity of purpose that Tom embodies even as he leaves his family behind:
“His resolution to dedicate himself to helping his people has a messianic ring that is strongly reminiscent of Christ’s farewell to His disciples” (113). Tom leaves his family to become the very spirit of resistance on behalf of a larger humanity like Jesus Christ left his disciples with the Holy Spirit to benefit them in their ministry for a larger humanity. Tom’s departure foreshadows another incident in which the flood serves as another oblique Biblical allusion in that, at first, it seems a force of apparent destruction, then becomes, however, a prelude to salvation:

The stream eddied and boiled against the bank. Then, from up the stream there came a ripping crash. The beam of the flashlight showed a great cottonwood toppling. The men stopped to watch. The branches of the tree sank into the water and edged around with the current while the stream dug out the little roots. The tree moved slowly down. Then a branch caught on a stump, snagged and held... The tree moved and tore the bank. A little stream slipped through. Pa threw himself forward and jammed mud in the break. The water piled against the tree. And then the bank washed quickly down, washed around the ankles, around the knees.

(Steinbeck 441)

Water, swelling up to flood, is the extreme opposite of the drought that initiated dispossession and the migration of the Okies westward. The water symbolizes the quenching of the thirst of the land. The Emersonian Oversoul, insofar as it includes both his concept of Nature and humanity, holds forth a promise of salvation from the harsh vagaries of natural disaster to the brutal oppression of men by men.
But “Rosasharn” gives birth to a stillborn fetus. Uncle John lets the baby flow down the stream: “Go down an’ tell ’em. Go down in the street an’ rot an’ tell ’em that way. That’s the way you can talk. Don’ even know if you was a boy or a girl. Ain’t gonna find out. Go on down now, an’ lay in the street. Maybe they’ll know then” (446). Out of death comes a silent cry to be heard. This fetus that had little chance to be a baby in the world signifies the transformation of the term Okie from one of degrading stigma to the Okies who now refuse their marginality in every sense, from dispossessed migrant to exploited worker. This androgynous being that might have been now signifies the hope that no men and women of the future will have to bear all the tragedy and dispossession that the Joads and others have suffered.

The flood keeps driving the Joads further from the “stream” until Ma and Rosasharn find a barn in which to wait out the storm. Rosasharn’s nursing of a dying man discovered within it is a heavily significant selfless action, providing life out of principle and embracing Tom’s omnipresent spirit in an intimate act of ultimate generosity and hospitality—saving life unconditionally. As French claims, “Tom has given up his concept of clan loyalty and has replaced it with the concept that one must help whoever needs help. Gradually the rest of the family comes to share this concept” (30). And Rosasharn becomes the agent of giving help to “whoever needs help.” Before Tom leaves, he repeats what Casy had said before he was killed, “You got no right to starve people” (392), and this desperate cry echoes through the Oversoul to be heard by Rosasharn.

In A Life in Letters, Steinbeck expresses how he intended his ending to be related to any human being’s need for survival: “And I am sorry but I cannot change that
ending... if there is a symbol, it must be an accident, it must be a stranger, and it must be quick... The giving of the breast has no more sentiment than the giving of a piece of bread” (178). As Tom aspires, his mission has already been begun by Rosasharn extending her generosity. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck conveys an optimistic if guarded view of human potential: “Hope implies a change from a present bad condition to a future better one. The slave hopes for freedom, the weary man for rest, the hungry for food” (86). This latter hope is the dying man’s need, and both are fulfilled through the Joads and their unconditional hospitality.

Steinbeck, in accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, says that the writer ‘is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams, for the purpose of improvement” (294). Through his Okies, the poverty and exploitation of dispossessed people are illustrated as the consequence of human faults and failures. Steinbeck also adds that “the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man’s proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit” (294). Tom shows this “capacity” to work for justice for the migrants, the Manself become Oversoul in action. From the beginning of the novel to the end, Tom is an outlaw. However, his outlaw status signifies his transcendental, philosophical quest that keeps moving beyond boundaries set by other human beings as a free soul moves, free like the wind.
Conclusion: The Grapes of Victory

The Okies are powerless in terms of wealth or the connections of social class to fight discrimination against them until they discover the unity of common purpose. Despite this fact, they do not use weapons to protest inhuman treatment or to claim their rights. What they always long for is victory for human dignity. Considering the symbolic resonance in the title of *The Grapes of Wrath*, grapes are red like blood, and the wine’s fragrance smells of sweet aroma when it is fermented. And they are clustered to each other in a bunch like the gathering Okies’ unity. However downtrodden and crushed the people may be, the fermenting of their anger leads to sweet hope in unity. Steinbeck’s vision, as expressed in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, is toward perfection: “Man grows toward perfection; animals grow toward man; bad grows toward good” (86). For the Okies, “perfection” means the “tramping out” of oppression, the achievement of equal opportunity, equal rights and equal justice—victory for human dignity. Thus, the title symbolizes victory for the Okies in that they now know the necessity of unified action.

According to Benson, Steinbeck asked his publisher, Pascal Covici, to include “all, all, all” of the lyrics to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” in the novel, and Covici accepted. Steinbeck added that “They’re all pertinent and they’re all exciting. And the music if you can” (175). Crockett interprets this inclusion as follows, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,’ [is] itself a stirring call for victory over the forces which were repressing another downtrodden group” (107). Julia Ward Howe wrote these lyrics during the Civil War to give inspiration to the Union Army:
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;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

CHORUS
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

(qtd. in Benson 42)

As a representative of the Okies, then—and of those now in their role—Tom’s full-fledged philosophical quest continues beyond the novel’s pages and its victory rises sublime through fermented wine in the voice of the people.
Works Cited


____________. The Log From the Sea of Cortez. New York: The Viking Press, 1941.
