

The American Novelist, John Steinbeck was a powerful writer of dramatic stories about good versus bad. His own views on writing were that not only should a writer make the story sound good but also the story written should teach a lesson. In fact, Steinbeck focused many of his novels, not on average literary themes rather he tended to relay messages about the many hard truths of life in The United States. Upon winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962 the Swedish academy introduced him by saying "He had no mind to be an unoffending comforter and entertainer. Instead, the topics he chose were serious and denunciatory..." This serious focus was not exempt from his two works "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men". "The Grapes of Wrath" has been recognized by many as "the greatest novel in American History" and it remains among the archetypes of American culture. Although "Of Mice and Men" may not have received as much fanfare as the other it is still a great classic that was recently made into a motion picture.

The focus of "The Grapes of Wrath" Is one family, the Joads, who has been kicked off their Oklahoma farm and forced to move to California to look for work. The story has historical significance as it is true that many families were forced, in the same way as the Joads, to leave their homes to look for work during the depression. It is in this fact that one can see how Steinbeck's intention in "The grapes of Wrath" was to depict the hardships people went through during an actual event in American history. Perhaps the most solemn message in this novel was the poor treatment of the dispossessed families as they reached California. In "Of Mice and Men" the reader is presented with a story that takes place in the same setting of "The Grapes of Wrath" This story details the hardships of two traveling companions while they are working at a ranch in California.

The common thread between these two novels is not necessarily the plot or the setting rather, it is the way in which Steinbeck relays his message. That is to say that, although both novels carry different story lines they both portray hard truths about human suffering. Steinbeck reveals these truths through his depiction of characters. In each story it seems that the characters were crafted by Steinbeck in a bias manner so as to emphasize the overall message of the book. It is quite obvious that all of Steinbeck's characters are either good or bad. Steinbeck himself said "as with all retold tales that are in people's heart's there are only good and bad things and black and white things and no in-between anywhere" In both novels the dispossessed characters are good and well intentioned and the wealthy people are brutal and mean. This of course is done to make the situation seem all that more hard on the dispossessed characters.

In "The Grapes of Wrath" the character of young Tom Joad is a prime example of how bias Steinbeck's portrayal was. With a quick glance at the history of Tom's life one would say that he is not really the good guy. Yet after reading "The Grapes of Wrath" the reader feels sorry for Tom and all of his faults are justified because of his situation. Likewise, the characters of Ma and the preacher, Jim Casey do not fit their traditional roles but, again, their actions are justified by Steinbeck. In the same way, the book "Of Mice and Men" portrays two men (Lennie and George) running from the law, looking for work. Lennie is a mentally handicap person who brings most of the trouble to the pair. Yet, despite all of his downsides the reader is made to feel sorry for him. George is portrayed in a good way until the end of the book where he kills Lennie, and even then the reader feels for George because of the predicament he is in. The rest of the characters in both novels are the rich and powerful. In "The grapes of Wrath" these rich people were not even given names and Steinbeck's dislike for them is obvious. This fact truly illustrates the message he is trying to get across . In "Of mice and Men" the boss and his son Curley are portrayed as the bad guys.

Note:

This is only my introduction unfortunately due to some extenuating circumstances I have not had enough time to do a complete rough draft. My plan is to characterize the characters in light of Steinbeck's bias portrayals and illustrate how the technique he used was effective in getting his point across. My next four points or paragraphs will be: 1.) Description of Tom Joad how he was bad yet good in the sense that his actions were bad but his cause was for the better.

2.) Description of Ma and the preacher, how they were characterized out of their traditional roles and how their straying from the norm was justified and helped relay to the reader the desperation of the family's situation.

3.) The roles of Lennie and George, how they were outcasts and Lennie killed a woman yet the reader felt sorry for them both because they were on the opposite side of a greater injustice.

4.) Portrait of the rich and powerful. How Steinbeck's ignorance of not giving them names proved he did not like them. Every time they came up in the story they were doing something bad.

And my conclusion.

Hopefully I will get a chance to see you today, I have third period prep so I will look for you and we could chat. Thanx.

"The Grapes of Wrath", "Of Mice and Men"
Character Study

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