

Many writers in American literature try to instill the philosophy of their choosing into their reader. This is often a philosophy derived at from their own personal experiences. John Steinbeck is no exception to this. When traveling through his native Californian in the mid-1930s, Steinbeck witnessed people living in appalling conditions of extreme poverty due to the Great Depression and the agricultural disaster known as the Dust Bowl. He noticed that these people received no aid whatsoever from neither the state of California nor the federal government. The rage he experienced from seeing such treatment fueled his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck sought to change the suffering plight of these farmers who had migrated from the midwest to California. Also, and more importantly, he wanted to suggest a philosophy into the reader, and insure that this suffering would never occur again (Critical 1). Steinbeck shows in *The Grapes of Wrath* that there is no one man, but one common soul in which we all belong to.

The subject of Steinbeck's fiction is not the most thoughtful, imaginative, and constructive aspects of humanity, but rather the process of life itself (Wilson 785). Steinbeck has been compared to a twentieth century Charles Dickens of California; a social critic with more sentiment than science or system. His writing is warm, human, inconsistent, occasionally angry, but more often delighted with the joys associated with human life on its lowest levels (Holman 20). This biological image of man creates techniques and aspects of form capable of conveying this image of man with esthetic power and conviction; the power to overcome adversity through collectiveness, or in this case, as one combined soul (Curley 224).

Steinbeck's basic purpose of the novel is essentially religious, but not in any orthodox sense of the word. He is religious in that he contemplates man's relation to the cosmos and attempts to transcend scientific explanations based on sense experience. He is also religious in that he explicitly attests the holiness of nature (Curley 220). A common fear during the nineteenth century was one of this naturalism leading to the end of reverence, worship, and sentiment. Steinbeck, however, is the first significant author to build his own set of beliefs, which some would refer to as a "religion," upon a naturalistic basis. Because of his "religious" style on a naturalistic basis, he is able to relate man with a natural soul that they own, and combine them into a grouping of a larger, more important soul (220).

America and American literature was founded on the spirit of necessity of the individual. But Steinbeck disagrees with this idea of individualism. He feels that the individual by himself is not going to succeed through the efforts of his own soul. It is through the combined effort of everyone's souls that a common goal is able to be reached (Critical 5). *The Grapes of Wrath* uses the naturalistic movement of literature to prove this as well. Forces like economic, social, environmental, and genetic forces fight against the Joads (the main family of the novel) and other Okies (the farmers and their families who migrated west from Oklahoma in search of work). But in the end, the Okies themselves are triumphant because they learn that they belong together, and their souls cohere to this group. Steinbeck points out that the only way these naturalistic forces can be beaten is through a combined group effort.

Steinbeck also promotes humanism in the novel as a way of expressing the idea of an oversoul. The end of the novel defeats the accusation that the Okies are animals with no human characteristics at all. The characters of Uncle John and Pa help to build a dam to prevent the rising waters from entering the boxcar that they are living in. Steinbeck shows this image as a common goal among the combined souls of the two men to survive and the humanity of man, in midst of great inhumanity and indifference (Critical 5).

Unanimism, another one of Steinbeck's beliefs, is also evident throughout the novel. Steinbeck's unanimism was derived from his friend, the biologist, Edward Ricketts. Ricketts' interest was in groups of marine creatures functioning as one organism (Smith 411). Unanimism is a group theory wherein the collective emotions of

two people, of two small rural communities, of cities, of countries, and of the whole world transcend and are superior to individual ones (441). Or, in other words, in relation to the soul, the entire soul is greater than the sum of its parts. This is shown in the novel where the final triumph of the Okies as a collective soul is greater than their individual battles as single souls.

Transcendentalism is a belief in the Emersonian oversoul. This is where no one owns an individual soul, because each soul contributes to a universal soul. Transcendentalists feel that harming others merely hurts oneself. Emerson, the forefather of transcendentalism, believes that self-reliance and individualism are the key to happiness (Grapes 5).

Steinbeck, who reflects transcendentalist views in his novel, rejects Emerson's belief of individualism, however. Steinbeck believes that collective happiness is the way to total happiness (Critical 3). In the novel, Casey's thoughts reflect Steinbeck's thoughts, and transcendentalism evolves in Casey's mind throughout the novel (Grapes 2). Casey makes the revelation to Tom that, "Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" (Steinbeck 345). Steinbeck also supports his transcendentalist views in the novel through the fact that helping one another and sharing with one another is the key to survival for the Joads and the rest of the Okies, which contributes to the importance of the one combined soul (Grapes 2).

Steinbeck's theory of the collective soul goes against the foundation of the American system. This theory in American society is that the thoughts and rights of the individual, and hopefully, other individuals will fall into the same thoughts and rights (Critical 3). Democracy, on the other hand, is for the rights of the majority, and is not influenced by the path of the individual. Steinbeck uses this theory in his analogy of the soul, and in the transition of the Joads. The Joads, at first, are only concerned about the well-being of the family. But after witnessing the suffering of the other farmers, they change their views. The Joads realize that only through a collective effort can the Okies overcome the appalling circumstances in which they are forced to live (3).

In Plato's Republic, Plato uses a diagram of the perfect city to analyze the human soul and what is good and bad for it (Critical 4). Steinbeck also uses a Platonic-like setting to show how the individuals of a group contribute to the soul of the whole. He also does this by using each character to symbolize what is good or bad for the soul. Each of the twelve characters which make up the family the novel have a distinct purpose in the group. When one leaves, the group suffers for it, making the chance for success not as strong. This relates to the idea of each of the members' soul contributing to the success or failure of one soul as a whole, and has no regard to any individual outcome in terms of success and failure (4).

The theme of the novel, relating to the theory of a universal soul, is represented through the entire social condition of which Steinbeck's characters are a part of, and it is primarily in terms of the total situation that they have existence (Lisca 91). Thus, their role is collective, and representational of the theme of the novel in regards to the Okies and the migrant workers just as in the novel the evicting landlords are in reality representative of the actual Shawnee Land and Cattle Company, and the growers are representative of the California Farmer's Association (91). These representative elements add to the theme in that each soul is a group, and together they add up to one collective group in a common plight (91).

As far as the central narrative about the education of the Joads is concerned, the novel is not a social novel (Curley 223). It is, however, in danger of being known as a period piece, and needs to be defined as art rather than sociology. It stresses group achievement, and depicts the necessity of education and reformation, rather than just showing the results on people of a national disaster (224). If the Joads had not been caught up in the events of the particular time period and place that troubles the public, the novel would be more easily recognizable as a tale of the travail and triumph of the human spirit as a group of people (224).

The characters of the novel, mainly the twelve that make up the family, each

represent a specific characteristic that is unique to the family, and when added up, create a larger oversoul. The character Casey represents spiritual belief and reasoning. Rose of Sharon represents humanity and kindness, and Ruth and Winnie represent childhood and family pride, and selfishness, respectively. Noah represents a childlike innocence and a feeling of belonging to society. Connie represents youthful aspirations of the future, and Pa stubbornness and a refusal to give up the fight against life. Uncle John represents guilt, and Grandpa represents heritage. Ma represents hope, and strength (second to Tom). Tom represents idealism, and strength, while Grandma represents family unity, and Al represents the wildside and youthful rebellion (Critical 4). As the characters leave the story, the family is deprived of their unique characteristics they contribute to the family soul. At the novel's end, the key pieces to the soul are still there: Ma, Pa, Rose of Sharon, Uncle John, Winnie, Ruthie, and Al. These characters provide the group and the collective soul with enough different characteristics or pieces of the soul to still proceed (4).

Although some characters depart and leave the family, like Tom and Casey, they still fight for the well-being of the collective soul. Casey leaves to fight the low wages and abominable conditions in which the people are forced to live in. And when Casey dies, Tom takes the cause up to fight the injustices, but not just the injustices in California. Tom states:

Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there.
Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If
Casey knowed, why, I'll be in the ways 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 537).

And when the Okies finally do rise from poverty and make it on their own, the mentality of Tom's fight is still there also. With the collective soul in Tom's mind, when one person succeeds, all who belong succeed too (Critical 5).

The characters of Ma and Rose of Sharon add to the collective soul as well. The speeches of Ma show that when people have nothing else, they are at the very least, kind to each other. Ma says, "Use' to be family was fust. It ain't so now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (Steinbeck 569). This shows that Ma has shifted from a person who was always dead set to keep the family together to a person who is looking out for everyone in the collective soul, not just the family (Critical 4).

A change is also evident in Rose of Sharon for the benefit of the collective soul. At the beginning of the novel, she is a self-centered person who does not think very highly of the family or of the people in similar circumstances. However, her attitude undergoes a change toward the end of the novel. With the loss of her husband, Connie, and her still-born baby, she transforms into a dynamic character who puts the cause of the group, survival, before the well-being of herself (Critical 4). This is shown in the end of the story when she makes the greatest sacrifice and gives a dying man sustenance through the milk from her breast. This illustrates the importance of the group soul as opposed to Rose of Sharon's individual soul.

The idea of the oversoul is also emphasized through some of the writing techniques utilized by Steinbeck. One in particular is the use of alternating chapters. The even numbered chapters of the book are dedicated to the tale of the Joad's plight, and the odd numbered chapters portray images and the movement of the entire migration west by the Okies. Steinbeck does this deliberately to show the Joads do belong to a larger group and many people are having the same difficulties and hardships as they are (Critical 3). These alternating chapters are used as a way of filling in the larger picture. Steinbeck uses a variety of literary devices to minimize their interruption of the narrative action, such as dramatization, juxtaposition, and the prose style itself (Lisca 92). The same folk dialect and figurative language reappear in the interchapters to continue the natural flow of the story. To put the Joads in a necessary situation to fulfill a larger picture would destroy their credibility as particular and real people (92). Again, the

theory of a collective soul is strongly pointed at by the alternating chapters.

The collective soul is not a new idea, but it does clash with the ideas that America was founded on. Steinbeck started to write the Grapes of Wrath with the idea of changing the philosophy in place in California, but it expanded to changing the idea of the system in place in America. Steinbeck wished to make his mark in the field of American literature, and that he did with this novel. Through the novel, Steinbeck shows that there is not just one singular soul, but something bigger, which all men belong to.