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The Great Depression and working-class in novels by John Steinbeck

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma The Great Depression and working-class in novels by John Steinbeck vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V dne

Podpis

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INTRODUCTION

“And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed.”¹

— John Steinbeck

The Great Depression is one of the biggest economic crises that has ever happened in the United States of America. The American citizens went through this period during the 1930s. One of the largest groups affected by this crisis was the working-class. People and their families suffered because the unemployment rate was high, many lost their homes, and many were oppressed by the higher-class people. Author John Steinbeck portrays these events in works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936), which will be analyzed in this thesis. The first book mostly focuses on a family and their journey as they are forced to migrate by the circumstances from Oklahoma to California, their goal is to work hard for a better life. In the latter, the characters choose much radical approach and start a strike against their employers because they believe this will help them achieve the better life. Even though the journey of the characters from each book is different, they the same goal and that is to survive this crisis and ensure better future for themselves or their families.

The thesis will focus on several aspects and themes in each book. First, it will focus on the meaning of both titles and the setting. In both works the themes explored will be Group versus Individual with focus on John Steinbeck’s theory of phalanx, Morality, Concept of Power and Class and the American Dream. Furthermore, the analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) will focus on The Importance of Land and Transcendental phalanx. The Morality in *In Dubious Battle* (1936) will be, additionally, explored through Utilitarianism.

Since these novels by John Steinbeck are set during the Great Depression crisis in the United States, the general belief might be that the characters are portrayed as sad, desperate, or lonely. As well as people who lost their morals, dreams or even their humanity. It is relevant to see that through his writing John Steinbeck proves that even during a national crisis, people can stay through to themselves, have dreams and help others in need.

The aim of the thesis is to explore John Steinbeck’s portrayal of the American working-class during the Great Depression in the two novels. The chosen approach is to

¹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 324.

analyze, through close reading of the novels, the characters' actions, words, and journeys.

The analysis of the themes in the novels and the Great Depression, in the thesis, suggests that John Steinbeck created people that have strong ties to their land and that taking them away from it destroys them. People, who discover that through unity with their families or strangers they meet can achieve what they desire. People, who even in the crisis did not forget their morals and help others, even in an untraditional way. He portrayed the working-class as the lower class that is not afraid to take a stance against the higher-class and furthermore, people, who through their dreams represent the concept of the American Dream.

1 THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN US AND THE WORKING-CLASS

The first part of the thesis will focus on how working-class life was during several periods of American history. In particular, during World War I and after, the twenties and 1929 onward. The focus will be mainly shifted toward employment, its conditions and strikes organized by the workers. In addition, one part will be devoted to two main causes of the Great Depression and migrant workers. This is important as a background information before the analysis of the two works by John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936).

1.1 Working-class life before the Great Depression (after the WW I to 1929)

The American working-class went through several stages, before the Great Depression, regarding their employment. This section will show how World War I, unexpectedly, brought jobs to the American workers, but also, how they lost them after and how they dealt with it.

1.1.1 Employment during World War I and employment and strikes immediately after the war

World War I, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, brought a time of prosperity regarding employment and social status during these years, to many American workers. These workers started earning a lot of money from war jobs along with political power during the four years of the war, which brought steady employment.² This means that many working-class people were experiencing a strange sense of security during the war, they were able to have a steady income to support themselves and their families. However, this sense of security was soon to be lost after the end of the war and, years later during the onset of the Great Depression.

The writer John Steinbeck lived in a Salinas Valley during the World War I. In *Mad at the World: A Life of John Steinbeck* (2020), the author William Souder writes that the whole valley was ready to join the war, despite their German origin.³ The high school, which young Steinbeck attended, was training the boys to be ready for combat after the end of their school years.⁴ Many of these boys, including Steinbeck, worked at farms in California, because the men were fighting in the war and the farms needed the

² Helgeson, *American Labor and Working-Class History, 1900-1945*, 14.

³ Souder, *Mad at the World: The Life of John Steinbeck*, 25.

⁴ Souder, *Mad at the World: The Life of John Steinbeck*, 25.

extra help.⁵ Thus, Steinbeck himself experienced this period during the war, where everybody could work, either directly as participants in the war or filling for them on farms.

The end of the first World War meant a loss of the war jobs, secure income for their families and need to find employment elsewhere. Furthermore, the end of the war brought an unexpected and unpleasant change in labor as it required “[...] union recognition, shorter hours, and raises exceeding the inflation rate,”⁶ and affected were, for example, steelworkers and miners.⁷ Additionally, other workers from other working fields were suffering under unfair conditions and these include agriculture and textile workers.⁸

As a result, American citizens from the working-class proceeded to take action and fought for their labor rights. However, “[...] unions’ efforts to institutionalize their place in an “industrial democracy” were roundly defeated in a series of strikes between 1919 and 1921.”⁹ For example, there was a strike composed of 60,000 in Seattle, a police force strike in Boston and in Pittsburgh 350,000 of steelworkers and unfortunately, in every single strike, the workers lost leaving them jobless and eager to work for basically any wage.¹⁰

Therefore, the working-class Americans were forced to live in poverty and unsuitable labor conditions at least until the 1920s.

1.1.2 The Twenties

A new era came after the struggling period, which occurred after the war. This era lasted from 1921 until 1929. This meant a better living standard for the American citizens, they were earning more money than before and furthermore, “[f]or many people, it was a time of fun and a new feeling of personal freedom.”¹¹ Consequently, this period in the United States is very often referred to as the Roaring twenties. This section provides an additional information about the working-class and employment situation in the United States before the Great Depression started.

⁵ Souder, *Mad at the World: The Life of John Steinbeck*, 25.

⁶ Mintz, “Historical Context: Post-World War I Labor Tensions.”

⁷ Mintz, “Historical Context: Post-World War I Labor Tensions.”

⁸ Helgeson, *American Labor and Working-Class History, 1900-1945*, 15.

⁹ Helgeson, *American Labor and Working-Class History, 1900-1945*, 14.

¹⁰ Helgeson, *American Labor and Working-Class History, 1900-1945*, 14.

¹¹ O’Neal, “*Ushering in a New Decade*,” 5.

In addition, Americans also experienced a time of economic and labor prosperity. The author of *Making America: A History of the United States* (2001), Carol Berkin, states that with the economy rising after the year 1921, the Gross National Product rose by 16 percent during the years 1921 and 1922 and the unemployment rate dropped to 2 percent and until the year 1929, it stayed between 2 and 5 percent.¹² She also notes that many manufacturing workers had steady employment and their pay conditions improved from 21 dollars in 1922 to 24 in 1925, even improving later in 1929 to near \$25. Also, as the result of declining prices in agriculture, Americans experienced a decrease in pricing of food and clothing.¹³

Because of these prosperous times, most of the American workers and unions did not organize as many strikes as before. However, it is important to note that some were still occurring. In 1928, only 604 strikes occurred, which was the lowest number of strikes since the year 1884. A year later in 1929, the number had risen to 900 strikes, however, it was only 1.2 percent of the labor force.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the Roaring twenties are largely considered to be only prosperous, it is evident that some percentage of the working-class was still fighting for their labor rights.

John Steinbeck also profited from the availability of jobs during the 1920s. During his time in New York, he worked as a construction worker, a reporter, a freighter on a ship that took him home to California.¹⁵ There he immediately found a job as a caretaker of a vacation home, which gave him an opportunity to write a lot.¹⁶

However, while the living in the urban areas in the United States got better, the people in rural areas still suffered. Alison Morretta in *John Steinbeck and the Great Depression* (2014), explains that “[...] most people did not even have electricity, and the average American farmer was struggling while big business was cashing in.”¹⁷ John Steinbeck was himself a witness of this in his lifetime. While he still lived in California a studied at Stanford University, he had to work to help pay for his education, so he usually worked at Spreckels Sugar Company.¹⁸ In this job, he was able to meet a lot of farm laborers and he saw how they were not earning enough money for many hours

¹² Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 730.

¹³ Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 730.

¹⁴ Zieger and Gall, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 45.

¹⁵ Reef, *John Steinbeck*, 31-33.

¹⁶ Reef, *John Steinbeck*, 35.

¹⁷ Morretta, *John Steinbeck and the Great Depression*, 9.

¹⁸ Reef, *John Steinbeck*, 27.

spent on the job. Catherine Reef writes that Steinbeck “[...] saw inequality in America, and it made him angry.”¹⁹

In short, the 1920s in the United States were divided into two sides. On one hand, people in the cities were thriving and were experiencing an enhancement of their lives. On the other hand, people in the rural areas were still suffering from labor inequality. Similarly, to the characters in both *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936). In the first one mentioned, they lived in a rural area in Oklahoma, where they not only were hit by the Dust Bowl, but also, they had to move to California for better job opportunities. In the latter, the story is set in a rural area of California and the characters are organizing a strike for better job conditions.

1.2 The Great Depression

After the Roaring twenties, a new era started in the United States, known as the Great Depression. This following section of the thesis will describe two main causes. Particularly, the stock market crash, first focusing on the market before the crash and then, on the crash. Then, the focus will shift onto the Dust Bowl. The description of both disasters is relevant as a background information for the analysis of the two Steinbeck’s novels because their consequences are portrayed through the characters’ lives.

1.2.1 Stock market – before the crash and the crash

In the 1920s the American stock market was thriving. According to George Brown Tindall in his work *America: A Narrative History* (1993), the “[...] American business had entered a New Era of permanent growth.”²⁰ Nonetheless, some businesses still crashed. For example, the Florida real-estate boom crashed in 1926. However, at this point, no consequences arose because the successful stock market saved the situation.²¹ Due to the booming market, many people started taking advantage of the situation and wanted to get hold of the stock no matter what. For instance, the stock could be bought on margin, putting down only a 10 percent payment, then, borrow the rest of the money from a broker. In case of the stock price falling down and if the buyer could not provide more money, the broker was able to sell the stock to not lose

¹⁹ Reef, *John Steinbeck*, 29.

²⁰ Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 720.

²¹ Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 720.

money.²² On the other hand, during 1929, employment and others were on the downfall, while the stock market was still rising due to confidence and greediness of the American citizens.²³ In addition, the stock market experienced a series of crashes, three months into the year 1929. Specifically, this happened on March 25 (1929) but the market stabilized a couple of months later and later on, in September 3 the prices were at their peak before the crash.²⁴

It is evident that despite the economic and employment situation in America was getting worse, the stock market was still very growing at the end of the 1920s. They were ignoring the warning signs of what is about to come.

In the fall of 1929 is when the stock market started falling apart. It, specifically, started on Thursday, October 24 with 12,894,650 shares being exchanged. A couple of days later, on Monday, October 28, over 9,250,000 shares were exchanged, which is significantly less than before.²⁵ Then, the following day, which was Tuesday, October 29, “[...] stock prices fell so far and so fast that the gains of the previous years were wiped out.”²⁶ The stock market crash is infamously one of the greatest causes of the Great Depression in the United States. Consequences on the lives of working-class Americans will be discussed in more detail in section 1.3.

John Steinbeck is very well-known for portraying the Great Depression in the United States and his characters’ journeys throughout the period. It is mainly three of his works in which he focuses on this topic, are *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and the last two are analyzed in this thesis. All three of these works follow the struggles of workers in America during the 1930s. Even though the stock market crash is not specifically mentioned in these works, it is undoubtedly considered as one of the major causes of the Great Depression. Thus, the portrayal of the crash is evident because the characters are living through the consequences the crisis caused. They are losing their jobs and their homes, which the owner banks and companies are destroying for their own wealth.

²² Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 720.

²³ Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 721.

²⁴ Gerdes, “The Introduction,” 14.

²⁵ Gerdes, “The Introduction,” 14.

²⁶ Gerdes, “The Introduction,” 14.

1.2.2 The Dust Bowl

As opposed to the stock market crash, the Dust Bowl is a natural disaster that was one of the causes of the Great Depression. The result of it was that a huge number of American citizens lost their homes along with their crops and had to migrate to another part of the United States.

Before the Dust Bowl and the stock market crash, the American agriculture was already in crisis.²⁷ Then-president Herbert Hoover reached out to the Congress to federal Farm Board, in order to create stabilization of prices by buying agricultural products off of farmers on the open market. A successful Agricultural Marketing Act was passed in May 1929.²⁸ Nevertheless, shortly after the Farm Board ran out of money and could not provide financial support for the American farmers, which caused them to go bankrupt. In 1932, almost a third of farm estates, which is 60 percent in South Dakota only, were taken from owners and later even auctioned off.²⁹ Consequently, the American farmers suffered even before the Dust Bowl started. Even though the Agricultural Marketing Act seemed like a success at first, it became a failure later due to the Farm Board's fund shortage. The farmers and their crops and estates could not be supported. Thus, they were forced to give up everything they had and migrate to another part of the United States.

On top of that, the Dust Bowl hit a part of the United States. This agricultural disaster, which added to the start of the Great Depression, lasted from 1931 until the year 1939. In *The Dust Bowl: An Interactive History Adventure* (2009), Allison Lassieur describes that the decrease in rainfall caused a dry land in these parts, also called The southern Great Plain: Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Kansas and Colorado.³⁰ Furthermore, as Carol Berkin describes this disaster was caused also by winds, which agitated the dust on the lands, which then could spread more than 200 miles across and up to 8,000 feet high. During the worst year of the Dust Bowl, which was in 1938, more than 850 million of topsoil were ruined. Moreover, the dust destroyed people's homes, clothing, furniture, and food.³¹ In short, this natural disaster caused damages to the crops and properties in the Great Plain parts, making it impossible to keep living there.

²⁷ Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 773.

²⁸ Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 773.

²⁹ Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 773.

³⁰ Lassieur, *The Dust Bowl: An Interactive History Adventure*, 9.

³¹ Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 773.

As a result, families decided to migrate mostly to the West. Especially, from Texas, Arkansas, or Oklahoma, so they were called Arkies and Okies, and they travelled to California because it offered a warm climate and undamaged agriculture. Consequently, the population in California increased to over a million people, some were successful there and some were not and had to spend more time on the road looking for a job.³² In conclusion, the worsened conditions destroyed homes, belongings, and crops of the American citizens. It forced thousands of people and their families out of their lands and migrate they had to migrate to other parts of the United States. Which, as evident, was California in most cases. For all these reasons, the Dust Bowl is an enormous cause of the American Great Depression.

The Dust Bowl is, in fact, portrayed in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The author portrays this natural disaster in the very first chapter. He describes how the rain stopped falling on the ground in Oklahoma, how the winds started blowing stronger and stronger each day and how the dust kept thickening the air. He writes, "[t]he dawn came, but no day."³³ In addition, he describes the people, who had to live with the dust, "[m]en and women huddled in their houses, and they tied handkerchiefs over their noses [...] and wore goggles to protect their eyes."³⁴ Furthermore analysis of the Dust Bowl and its effect on the land and the people will be in section 2.2 Setting – Importance of Land.

1.3 Working-class life effected by the Great Depression

All the disasters and causes of the Great Depression, whether it was a natural cause like the Dust Bowl, or the stock market crash discussed above, had several consequences on the American citizens and workers. For example, the unemployment percentage grew overwhelmingly high over a couple of years, from 1.6 million in 1929 to 12.8 million in 1933, which in percentages is growth from 3 to 25 percent.³⁵ In *The Emotional Life of the Great Depression* (2019), which looks at the American Great Depression through the emotional side of the American citizens, the author John Marsh describes that the fear of unemployment was the most common during this period. The

³² Berkin, *Making America: A History of the United States*, 782.

³³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 5.

³⁴ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 5.

³⁵ Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 721.

reason for this was that people would not have a safety net to fall back on when they got into a harsh financial situation.³⁶

In short, unemployment in America increased enormously over a couple of years since the beginning of the Great Depression. This created issues for millions of people in the United States. These issues included no jobs to provide for themselves, their families, or the ability to take care of their home or lands. On top of that, they had to cope with their emotions and fears during this period.

What is more, since the beginning of the Great Depression, strikes organized by unions and the working-class started to increase. Author George Rawick in his work *Working-class Self-Activity* (1983), which focuses on the struggles of American workers up to the 1970s, describes that “[i]n 1932 there were only 840 strikes; in 1933 there were 1,700; by 1936, 2,200; by 1937, 4,740; in 1938, only 2,500; in 1941, 4,000.”³⁷ As you can see, the number of strikes organized by the American workers increases each year until the end of World War II.

One of the strikes in the year 1932 was organized by the World War I veterans because they demanded to get paid their bonus for their services to the country, which was already approved in 1924 by the Congress but the veterans never received it.³⁸

Undoubtedly, workers in the United States needed to start fighting for their rights and their money because of the country’s stressful situation. This is evident from the higher numbers of strikes increasing each year and veterans trying to immediately get the money they were supposed to get several years back.

Although the Great Depression created desperate and poor people, George Rawick importantly notes in his work mentioned above, that during the 1930s the American workers not only created powerful unions never seen anywhere in the rest of the world but also “[t]he working class of America won victories of a scale and quality monumental in the history of the international working class.”³⁹ Furthermore, the workers were capable of doing that on their own. The workers organized the strikes at first and through those unions were created, these then became successful organizations in the fight for better conditions.⁴⁰ In fact, just like the characters, John Steinbeck created in one of his novels about the Great Depression period, *The Grapes of Wrath*

³⁶ Marsh, *The Emotional Life of the Great Depression*, 90.

³⁷ Rawick, “*Working-Class Self-Activity*,” 145.

³⁸ Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, 725.

³⁹ Rawick, “*Working-Class Self-Activity*,” 145.

⁴⁰ Rawick, “*Working-Class Self-Activity*,” 145.

(1939). Two characters express the want to gather people and defend themselves against the system. They want to keep on adding people to their cause, which could be, in a long run, considered a union formed through a strike. This will be more explored in an analysis of the novel.

What is more, a strike is one of the most dominant components in John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936). In *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (1975), he writes to his friend George Albee about his depiction of the strike in the story. He writes, "I'm not interested in strike as means of raising men's wages, [...] I wanted to be merely a recording consciousness, judging nothing, simply putting down the thing."⁴¹ Steinbeck considers himself only as an observer of the event in his story, he simply portrays the realness of strikes that American citizens were going through during the Great Depression.

⁴¹ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 98.

2 THE GRAPES OF WRATH

The Grapes of Wrath (1939) is a novel written by John Steinbeck, which is set during the period of the Great Depression in the United States. The novel was first published in April 1939.

The story in this novel focuses on the Joad family living in Oklahoma. One of the Joad sons Tom is coming back from prison and finds his family moved into his uncle John's house. Other members of the family are Granma, Grampa, Pa Joad, Ma Joad, Noah Joad, Al Joad, daughter Rose of Sharon and her husband Connie; and two youngest children Ruthie and Winfield. Also, they are accompanied by a former priest Jim Casy. The family was forced to move out of their home by the landowners. After seeing flyers about work in California, they decided to move there to find jobs and a better life for the family.

2.1 Meaning of the Title

In the first place, this part will focus on the meaning of the novel's title. First, it will be described what the inspiration for the title was and then, how it relates to the story itself.

As Robert DeMott notes in an introduction he wrote for the novel, it was Steinbeck's first wife Carol, who assigned the title to the novel. DeMott describes that Steinbeck's wife Carol played a big part in the novel's making. For example, she typed the manuscript or edited the text. Furthermore, he details that she presumably got inspired from Julia Ward Howe's "*Battle Hymn of the Republic*" while listening to a radio drama.⁴² The author, Steinbeck, then decided to keep the name for the novel.

Battle Hymn of the Republic by Julia Ward Howe:

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.⁴³

In fact, the title is not only a burst of inspiration from Steinbeck's wife. It also has another meaning, which is tied to the story in the novel. The author wrote a letter to

⁴² DeMott, "Introduction," xvii.

⁴³ Stossel, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Elizabeth Otis in 1938, where he talks about the meaning of the title. He writes, “[t]his is one of the great songs of the world, and as you read the book you will realize that the words have a special meaning in this book.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the exact words *grapes of wrath* are written in chapter twenty-five in the novel. In this chapter, Steinbeck describes all the men, who use their skills and their knowledge to take care of all the fruit and crop on their lands. Throughout the chapter, the mood changes because the farmers must get rid of their work. The reason is that the owners of the orchards are not paying enough money for picking of the fruit, thus, the farmers cannot afford to keep it growing. The author of the novel writes, “[i]n the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.”⁴⁵ As a consequence, all the people are not only angry because all the food is destroyed, but also, they are hungry and keep dying because of malnutrition.

2.2 Setting – Importance of land

One of the most important themes in the novel is the setting. More specifically, the importance of land. In the first place, this chapter will describe the importance of the land itself. Later, it will describe the significance of the land for people and the effects of leaving their homeland. To begin with, the condition of the land is very important to the people living on it and for their crop to survive. One of the instances of this is in the very first chapter of the novel. John Steinbeck starts the story with the description of Oklahoma. He first describes it as “red country and part of the gray country.”⁴⁶ Then, he begins to describe the countryside, especially the crops growing there, the effects that the weather has on them and the earth. Also, he shortly depicts the lives of the people living there and how they function in the conditions the weather is bringing. Particularly, the dust settling on all things there; the earth, the crops, the people, and their belongings. He describes the families coming out of their houses and seeing their corn ruined by the dust. The men stand there not letting their wives and children see the worry. The women were examining the men’s faces to see if they should be worried. The children were playing with the dust, but cautiously. When the women ask the men if they will be all right, the men just say they “don’t know.”⁴⁷ This answer calms the

⁴⁴ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 173.

⁴⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 477.

⁴⁶ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 3.

⁴⁷ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 7.

women down. However, when the day comes to an end, the men sit in their doorways “still-thinking-figuring.”⁴⁸

Undoubtedly, the dust is destructive for the well-being of the people living there. It is evident that they are worried about losing what they have built and the upcoming future. However, equally important, is the destruction of the land itself. John Steinbeck specifically describes the lands in Oklahoma. The dust there covers all things, such as the crops, the animals, and the earth. It destroys the life and the beauty of the land.

Secondly, the land is very important for the people that live on it. It is safe to say that it is crucial for them and their lives. They are tied to it through their hearts and souls and without it they suffer. As a matter of fact, this is the case for the Joad family. In *A Sacred Bond Broken: The People versus the Land in The Grapes of Wrath* (2017), the author Barbara Heavilin argues that “[t]heir very identity has been tied to the land they have left behind [...]”⁴⁹

During the time, when the Joad family is on their way to California, all the family members go through a scale of emotions. However, one member in particular, Grampa Joad starts behaving out of character. A while back when they were still on their homeland, he was a fierce, hardworking and a little bit of angry man. Whereas on the highway he starts to be unrecognizable and Steinbeck describes that “[...]his eyes were drugged and watery and still senseless.”⁵⁰ At one point, when they stop to rest, Tom asks him if he wants to get out of the car and Grampa says, “I ain’t a-goin’, I tell you. Gonna stay like Muley.”⁵¹ Muley was a neighbor of the Joad family and when all the families, including his own, left to find a better place, he did not.

Later, when the family makes another stop and meets another family, who lets them put Grampa in their tent. Jim Casy goes into the tent to look at Grampa. When he examines the old man, he starts to have seizure-like tics, mumbles unrecognizable sounds and is having a fever. Casy determines this as a stroke. After Grampa dies and the family buries his body, they sit around a fire, eating dinner and talking about Grampa’s death. Casy says, “An’ Grampa didn’ die tonight. He died the minute you took ‘im off the place. [...] He was that place, an’ he knowed it.”⁵² Clearly, Grampa

⁴⁸ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 7.

⁴⁹ Heavilin, “*A Sacred Bond Broken: The People versus the Land in The Grapes of Wrath*,” 24.

⁵⁰ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 169.

⁵¹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 169.

⁵² Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 199.

Joad suffered after being forced from his homeland by the circumstances. His suffering results in his death, which is caused by the separation from his home, as Jim Casey notes.

Granma is the second family member of the Joad family, who dies on the road. Similarly, to Grampa, her condition is weak right after the family leaves their home. For an elderly person, the traveling is not safe and with addition of grief because the loss of the homeland, it is even more dangerous. On top of that, she starts getting worse right after her husband dies. She either sleeps or is cathartic and mumbles nonsense. Ma is her primary caretaker; she is constantly by her side. In one instance, Ma “could feel the struggling body and the struggling heart”⁵³ of Granma right before she dies. Therefore, it is obvious that Grampa and Granma did not only die for one reason. He was old and he must have been having a hard time on the road, but as one of the characters notes, his death was caused by the separation from his homeland. He could not survive without it, because his ties to the land were that strong. The same goes for Granma, many other factors contributed to her death. However, the loss of her husband and the land that they have lived on their entire lives proved to be deathly to her as well.

Another important setting is the highway. The road that the family travels on to California. On one hand, the highway is a road to something new, a new start. Start that the family feels will be good for them and will turn their lives for the better. However, it is also a place, where bad things happen to them. Ones that would never happen if they were able to stay home. As Rick Marshall argues in his work called *Steinbeck's Cognitive Landscapes in "The Grapes of Wrath": The Highway as Commentary on 1930s Industrialization* (2011), the highway was a way to escape for the migrants, however, the highway does not mean freedom for them because it represents the fact that they lost their homes.⁵⁴

As was mentioned above, the highway is where both oldest family members die. They are Grampa and Granma. Both were fierce, strong, and respected members of the family. Even though they were older, they did not need to be taken care of. However, the highway was too much for them. They started feeling sick and eventually, both died before they could get to California. Furthermore, the highway for them meant that they were uprooted from their homeland and without it they could not survive. Admittedly,

⁵³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 307.

⁵⁴ Marshall, “*Steinbeck's Cognitive Landscapes in "The Grapes of Wrath": The Highway as Commentary on 1930s Industrialization*,” 61.

this would have never happened to them if they stayed home, thus, the highway only brought them to their deaths.

Another bad circumstance that happens on the highway is Noah's departure from the family. Noah is the oldest son of Ma and Pa. When the family is crossing Arizona, they stop by a stream of a river, very close to the border of California. After a while, Noah decides to stay, because he thinks people do not care for him and only tolerate him around because he is a family member. Tom then has to say this to Ma because Noah disappears. Ma is devastated, according to her the "[f]amily's fallin' apart."⁵⁵ Even one of the strongest family members, Ma, is starting to fall apart on the highway. From the beginning, she was a woman of a strong will and very opinionated. With everything that is going on and the loss of her oldest son is starting to be too much for her. She says, "Seems like I can't think no more."⁵⁶

Additionally, the pregnant oldest daughter of the family Rose of Sharon, is also travelling with them and so is her husband Connie. At one point in the story, the group realizes that none of them saw Connie around for a while. After Rosasharn says that Connie "[s]aid it would a been a good thing if he stayed home an' studied up tractors,"⁵⁷ the whole family suddenly realizes. Connie got scared and left. Not only did he abandon the whole family that counted on him but also most importantly he abandoned his pregnant wife, who needed him the most.

The highway might seem like a path to a better life for the family. Although, it does take them to California. It is a place, where they lose several people. Whether it is from an old age and homesickness, a need for another life without the family or a simple fear of the unknown that lies at the end of the road.

The last important setting in the story is California. It is the promised land that lies at the end of the highway. The Joad family expects a new beginning from California. Good jobs, a good home and a good life. The family, pretty much, based their whole move to California on an advertisement. An advertisement that promised there is a lot of work there picking fruit and they are promising high wages. They like the promise of picking oranges and peaches, all under the hot California sun and shade under the trees, which will keep them cool.

⁵⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 294.

⁵⁶ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 294.

⁵⁷ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 372.

One of Ma's expectations of California is to have a nice house for the family. She says to her son Tom, "I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. [...] [W]e all get jobs an' all work-maybe we can get one of them little white houses."⁵⁸ Despite the fact that California did not prove to be exactly what the family thought it would be, which will be seen later in the thesis, it is still important in the story as a setting. California is the promised land to which everyone travels to for an improvement of their lives. They believe that this land is where their own and their families future will be better than the past. Their belief is filled with images of plenty of work for everyone, high wages, and nice houses.

2.3 Group vs. Individual

In this following section, the focus will be first shifted to the nature of group explored through John Steinbeck's *Argument of Phalanx*. Then, Transcendental phalanx will be explored, more specifically, a person's connection to nature and all the people. Lastly, the thesis will focus on an analysis of the individual in the novel.

2.3.1 The Importance of Group Explored Through Steinbeck's *Argument of Phalanx*

In 1933 John Steinbeck wrote an essay called "*Argument of the Phalanx*", where he explores the idea of an individual working alone in life in contrast to individuals forming a group. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), there is a lot of instances, where all kinds of people have to work together as one and it is evident that when they do that, it is extraordinary and it makes wonders.

Jeffrey Wayne Yeager, furthermore, explains the phalanx in *The Social Mind: John Elof Boodin's Influence on John Steinbeck's Phalanx Writing, 1935-1942* (2013). He explains that Steinbeck developed the Phalanx based on conversations with Ed Ricketts, Joseph Campbell or Richard and George Albee.⁵⁹ Moreover, Yeager describes that Steinbeck "[...] used the theory to suggest that the group is able to achieve momentous social change through sheer power."⁶⁰ In a similar way, Sam McNeilly, author of *Visions from the Tide Pool: John Steinbeck's Interdependent Migrant Community*

⁵⁸ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 124.

⁵⁹ Yeager, "*The Social Mind: John Elof Boodin's Influence on John Steinbeck's Phalanx Writing, 1935-1942*," 31.

⁶⁰ Yeager, "*The Social Mind: John Elof Boodin's Influence on John Steinbeck's Phalanx Writing, 1935-1942*," 31.

(2018), writes that John Steinbeck's writing is full of examples of migrants workers cooperating together through a unit formation — the phalanx — and that cooperation is an example of an enormous strength.⁶¹

In short, it is not surprising that Steinbeck's use of the phalanx theory can be seen a lot throughout his stories. More specifically, in stories about families and other people, migrants or not. He shows that no matter who you are when you work together as a group, you will achieve great results. Following this explanation of Steinbeck's Argument of Phalanx, an analysis of the characters actions will provide examples from the novel, where it is evident that cooperation between family or strangers is always beneficial.

First, the use of phalanx can be seen after the Joad family decided to go through with the move to California. It is already getting dark when the family finally decides that they will start driving to California in the morning. From there, they are like a well-oiled machine. Every single person in the family knows what to do to get everything ready and what to bring with them. Whether it is cleaning, preparing food, organizing the car, or deciding what to take with. Interestingly, they do not discuss this, and nobody is assigned specifically what to do. Whether it is because they are a family or not, they move as one unit and just know what their job is. This is one of the first examples of the Joad family working together as a unit. They do not even need to speak about it, they just act together, and it all goes according to plan. This may be because the Joads are a family, however, they proved throughout the story several times, that working with other people as well as beneficial.

Next, it will be shown how a large group of complete strangers can work together. So far, it has been shown how only the family works excellently as a unit. In the following part, it will be shown how strangers from different parts of the country can work well together, more specifically, the women.

This can be seen when the Joad family finally arrives in California, specifically at the Weedpatch camp. This camp is sponsored by the government, they have a committee, which decides who can stay there and makes sure the camp is clean and the bathrooms are working.

The Weedpatch camp is full of people from different parts of the country, different beliefs, and different backgrounds. However, they all work as one in the camp. For

⁶¹ McNeilly, "*Visions from the Tide Pool: John Steinbeck's Interdependent Migrant Community*," 39, 42-43.

example, the women of the camp. They even have their own Ladies' Committee that checks up on the newly arrived women and if they are doing good. A manager of the camp says to Ma, "They had a chorus. Singing a hymn tune and rubbing the clothes all in time."⁶² Thus, the women stick together, making their duties more pleasurable when they do them in a group.

Furthermore, the men of the camp work perfectly together as well. The Weedpatch camp organizes these dances occasionally. Simply to just have fun and maybe forget about their life situation. However, the men in the Committee receive a message that the Farmers Association is trying to ruin the dance by sending people, who will try to start a fight. Usually, the police cannot enter the camp, but if there is a fight happening, they can.

After receiving the message, the men organize a plan, how to prevent violence and police entering their camp. Several strong men will be on the dance floor keeping an eye for the troublemakers, if they see some, they will stand around so that he cannot escape and peacefully escort him out. Soon enough after the dance starts, three suspicious men enter the camp and try to start a fight. The men of the camp execute their plan and it works out without a mistake. Thus, also the men's cooperation, in the Weedpatch camp, is beneficial. They are the protectors of their people and when they organize a group effort to keep their camp safe, it works out.

Finally, another example of successful execution of Steinbeck's phalanx theory can be seen toward the end of the novel. After the Weedpatch camp, the family finds a job picking peaches at Hoopers Ranch. However, this does not last long, and they move on. Later, they come across boxcars, which has signs on them that cotton pickers are needed. The family decides to stay to work and, they can live in of the boxcars.

The Joads are now doing better. This job enabled them to have dinner every night and buy new clothes. However, one day it starts raining and it does not stop for a couple of days. It seems that soon the rain will flood the boxcars. The families are ready to go, but because Rose of Sharon is now in labor, Pa wants to dig up a bank, so the water does not reach the boxcars. At first, the other men do not want to help; they protest that they do not have to care about a strangers' baby. So, Pa starts digging by himself. When the men see it, they cannot hold the urge to help and they work as a unit.

⁶² Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 415.

“Over them men came fury of work, fury of battle. When one man dropped his shovel, another took it up.”⁶³

Nevertheless, this plan did not work. However, only because mother nature stepped in and threw a tree down, so the men could not continue their work. On the other hand, they proved that with good morals and hard work, their unity strengthens. Even though they were hesitant to help a stranger at first. Still, the men were able to show their good character and a sense of teamwork.

2.3.2 Transcendental Phalanx

Furthermore, there is another approach to the Steinbeck’s Phalanx Argument. According to some authors, Steinbeck’s Phalanx has a transcendental meaning as well. This is demonstrated mainly by two of the novel characters, Jim Casy and Tom Joad. To be more specific, these two characters form a sort of unity with nature and the land to understand how to become one with the migrants as well and help them get justice. Sam McNeilly, again, argues that these two characters recognize the power in the migrant phalanx “[t]rough transcendent understanding and Cooperative Ecology [...]”.⁶⁴

Jim Casy is a former preacher, who gave up preaching because he thinks he is a sinner and cannot continue to do his job. On the other hand, he did not give up on people. When Tom Joad is coming back home from prison, he encounters Jim Casy. They start talking and Casy tells Tom about the reasons he gave up preaching. Also, he tells him about his epiphany. He tells him, “Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of.’[...] I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it.”⁶⁵ Jim Casy in this way “[...] exemplifies the potential of transcendent understanding in bringing about greater environmental and societal harmony.”⁶⁶

Casy’s opinion about all men being one big soul, in other words – one big cooperative unit, is confirmed to him when he spent time in jail. He was in jail because he covered for Tom Joad, who assaulted a deputy and cannot get in trouble because of his parole. Later, when the family resides at the Hoopers Ranch, one evening the people are angered. Tom goes to investigate the reason for their anger, and he finds Jim Casy. Casy escaped from jail and is now organizing a strike for better wages. He tells Tom

⁶³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 599.

⁶⁴ McNeilly, “*Visions from the Tide Pool: John Steinbeck’s Interdependent Migrant Community*,” 40.

⁶⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 33.

⁶⁶ McNeilly, “*Visions from the Tide Pool: John Steinbeck’s Interdependent Migrant Community*,” 37.

what he found in the jailhouse, he says, “Here’s me, been a-goin’ into the wilderness like Jesus to try find out somepin Almost got her sometimes, too. But it’s in the jail house I really got her.”⁶⁷ Then, he continues to tell a story of how the men were starving in jail. One of them started screaming for food, but nothing happened. However, when all the men started screaming, they received the food. Jim Casy first searches for truth or answer in nature. He finds it and discovers that all men are stronger when they work together. Later, in jail, he sees that this is not only his theory, but it works. With this knowledge, he sets out to help other people. Unfortunately, he dies trying.

Despite Casy’ death, he was able to give a lot of his wisdom to Tom Joad. Tom is able to observe Casy throughout the story and learn his ways. Also, he starts to act in a similar way as Jim Casy. After Tom kills Casy’ killer. The Joads must move, so the deputies do not find Tom and lynch him. The family find a job picking cotton and Tom hides in a cave nearby. Ma is the only one, who comes to visit Tom because she brings him food.

One night Ma comes to Tom’s hiding spot worried. Ruthie, Tom’s younger sister, was boasting to the other kids about her brother hiding from the law. Ma says to Tom that he must leave. Tom agrees and tells her that he has been thinking a lot about Casy’s theory. About all men being a part of one big soul and that teamwork and cooperation is key. Tom decides to become one with his surroundings and with all people in need, he says,

I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be eve’where-whenever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. [...] 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.⁶⁸

For all these reasons, Jim Casy and Tom Joad, throughout their journey realize the worth of transcendental phalanx. Not only, does John Steinbeck illustrate in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) the strength of a phalanx only through cooperation among

⁶⁷ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 521.

⁶⁸ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 572.

people, he also illustrates the importance of men and their nature of becoming one and taking action in their life.

2.3.3 Individual

In support of Steinbeck's phalanx theory, there is evidence in the novel that when an individual tries to live and make it on their own, they fail, and they feel miserable. The first example from the story, is the character Muley. He is a neighbor of the Joad family in Oklahoma. His family left to find a better life. Muley stayed behind because he did not want to abandon his homeland and his property.

Before Tom Joad and Jim Casy get to the house, where the Joad family now resides in Oklahoma, they meet Muley. He talks about his family leaving. He talks about how he could not go with them just because somebody else told him to. Muley starts talking, telling the two men about all the memories he has regarding this place how he wants to kill people and how he just wanders around his neighbor's empty houses. He talks for a very long time and at the end of his monologue, he apologizes, "I ain't talked to nobody for a long time. [...] "I been sneakin' aroun' like a ol' graveyard ghos'."69 To sum up, it is evident that the individual without a group or his family is miserable. He does not have a purpose, nobody to care for.

2.4 Morality

One of the themes in the novel and, one of the most important themes in the novel is the morality the characters keep proving they have. They lost their homes, their lands, and their family members, but they keep helping others. Even when, in some cases, it means that they would be left with nothing. Overall, in his novels, including *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the author John Steinbeck an important question "[...] whether it is possible to move from moral blindness to moral awareness."70

The first example of morality happens right after Tom Joad is released from prison. He does not have any money; thus, he cannot take a bus, he must walk. He comes across a truck driver and asks him if he could give him a ride. The driver points out a sticker on his car that says 'No Riders', but Tom tries to convince by saying that a

⁶⁹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 71.

⁷⁰ Allegretti, "John Steinbeck and the Morality of Roles: Lessons for Business Ethics," 26.

man can still be a good guy, even against his employer's wishes. The truck driver then goes through an inner monologue,

If he refused now, not only was he not a good guy, but he was forced to carry a sticker, was not allowed to have company. If he took the hitchhiker, he was automatically a good guy and, he was not one whom any rich bastard could kick around. [...] And he wanted to be a good guy.⁷¹

Then, he lets Tom get in his truck.

In a furthermore support for this analysis, Li Luchen, author of *Steinbeck's Ethical Dimensions* (2009) argues that Steinbeck's evaluation of the American society is "[...] often rooted in his fear that one's feverish nervousness to reach goals through unethical means will break down the integrity of individuals, whether they be politicians or businesspeople."⁷² Therefore, the truck driver followed his moral code. He could have lost his job and not be able to support his family or himself. However, he wanted to be a good guy and helped a stranger.

Another example of a simple moral act and act of kindness between strangers occurs after the family is on their way to California. When the Joad family is already on the road for a while, but not quite out of Oklahoma yet, they make a stop to rest. They want to make their stop in a ditch but there is already another car parked. The car belongs to the Wilson family and they let the Joads stay there with them. After a while of getting to know each other, the families realize that they can be useful for each other. The Wilsons have a tent and the Joads have a sick Grampa that needs to lay somewhere cool and comfortable. Even though, Sairy Wilson is also sick, they still lent the Joads their tent, in which Grampa then also dies. The Wilsons even let them bury Grampa in their only quilt.

On the other hand, the Wilsons have a broken car and Al Joad is somewhat skilled when it comes to cars. Therefore, in return, they help the Wilsons with their car. It is important to help others in need because you never know when you are going to need help yourself. This was proved by the two families, who randomly met on the road. They did not have to help the other family, but they did.

⁷¹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 11.

⁷² Luchen, "*Steinbeck's Ethical Dimensions*," 72.

Despite the Joad family having barely enough food themselves, Ma Joad shows admirably good character. After Granma's death, the family stops at the closest camp near Bakersfield. Several other migrant families are already camping there. After settling down, Ma starts cooking dinner. In a while "[t]he children, fifteen of them, stood silently and watched. [...] The children were embarrassed to be there, but they did not go."⁷³ Ma learns from the children that some of them did not even have breakfast. The Joad family gathers to eat, but the other children still stand around, Tom tries to rush them away, but they stay. Ma says, "I can't send 'em away."⁷⁴ Consequently, Ma shares the food among the Joad family, but keeps enough left, so she can also give some food to the children. Although it meant that each of her own family members would get a little less food than usual, Ma still did it. She, as a mother herself, could not stand the sight of starving children. Furthermore, her morals did not let her keep the children starving.

Last but a very important act of morality and strength occurs at the end of the story. Rose of Sharon, the oldest daughter of the family, gave birth to a still-born baby. She gave birth during a flood when the family lived in boxcars and picked cotton. The flood forces the family to leave. They come across an old barn, where they find a little boy with his sick and starved father. The Joads decide to stay.

The boy then talks about his father and worried that he will starve to death and asks the Joads to help. In a moment of silence and understanding between Ma and Rosasharn, they know what to do. Their young daughter has milk in her breasts from when she was just recently pregnant. She does not hesitate and offers her breast to the dying old man, so he can survive. Rose of Sharon was in the process of mourning her dead baby, she did not have to save the man, but she did. She was only a nineteen-year-old woman, who did not have to feel comfortable giving her breast milk to the older man, but she did. It was the moral thing to do.

2.5 Concept of Power and Class

The following chapter will show how the higher class, the powerful ones, are depicted in the novel. Furthermore, how they hold their power over the lower or the working class. This class, the powerless ones, are controlled by the higher class and

⁷³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 344.

⁷⁴ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 351.

cannot control their lives, even in a national crisis, like the Great Depression. However, throughout the novel, there are several instances, where the lower-class people start to realize that they are the ones who can hold the power over the higher class. To begin with, an analysis will demonstrate examples from the novel, how the powerful higher class or the institutions are portrayed in the story.

In one of the earlier chapters, chapter five, the narrator describes how the owner men drive to the tenant's houses and wants them out of the property. Some of the properties are owned by a Company or a Bank, then, the owner men blame them. "[...] [A]s though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them."⁷⁵ Also, the banks were described as "machines and masters"⁷⁶, while the owner as their "slaves."⁷⁷

Furthermore, when the tenants try to convince the owner men to let them stay because next year might be better, the owner men say, "We can't depend on it. The bank-the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die."⁷⁸ The banks and companies are one part of the higher powerful class. They are described as monsters and machines, who will not survive without money. The owner men are the second part. A little less powerful than the banks or companies, but they still hold power over the tenants, being slaves to their owners.

Additionally, the companies and banks hold power over the people. People that will do anything for money that will provide food and shelter for their families. They need that money and they will take that money, even if that means destroying the lands of their neighbors. The monster makes them do that. The narrator in chapter five describes a man on a tractor, who works for a bank. "The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; [...], he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat."⁷⁹ During lunchtime, the man stops to eat. A tenant family nearby is watching and the father steps out to talk to him. He recognizes the man on the tractor, he is a son of his acquaintance, and he asks him why he does what he does. "I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day."⁸⁰ Moreover, the man on the tractor threatens the tenant that he has special orders. If the family is not moved out of the house, he can still

⁷⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 43.

⁷⁶ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 43.

⁷⁷ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 43.

⁷⁸ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 44.

⁷⁹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 48.

⁸⁰ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 50.

cave the house in and will be paid more money. And his “[...] youngest kid never had no shoes yet.”⁸¹

The bank makes people do jobs they would not normally be morally capable to do. However, the times are bad, and people will take any job to feed the family. They are even encouraged by the monster to hurt other families for more pay. The man on the tractor implies that he is not scared to do it, again, for his family. The bank makes people act inhuman. This shows how much the upper class holds the power over the lower class.

Lastly, the divide between the higher and the working class is obvious from the way of communication between these two groups. When the owner men are coming to the tenants to throw them out of their land, they do not talk to them as equal. They “[...] drove into the dooryards and sat in their cars to talk out of the window.”⁸² The same goes for the police, who are a part of the powerful group. At one point in the story, the Joad family stops at a camp and meet a guy named Floyd. He says to Tom, “Well, when the cops come in, [...], that’s how you want ta be. Dumb-don’t know nothin’. Don’t understand nothin’. That’s how the cops like us.”⁸³

In conclusion, the way the powerful people communicate with the working class is disgusting. They cannot communicate with them on an equal level, even in the case of taking their home. Furthermore, other powerful groups in order to feel superior have the need to make the working class seem less intelligent when they communicate with them. Brian Railsback, describes this difference between the two groups, in his *A Twenty-First-Century Grapes of Wrath: Jesmyn Ward's Salvage the Bones* (2016) as a “[...] a case of immense income inequality.”⁸⁴

In comparison to the powerful ones, an analysis will provide several examples from the novel, where the seemingly powerless people are not afraid to take a stand. They want and need to be the ones, who hold the power. For instance, the Weedpatch camp, which is a government camp in California. It is full of migrant families looking for work. Even if they do not have work, they can stay there and keep the place clean before finding a job. The Joads can hardly believe that this works and the man, who admits them in into the camp explains, “Works pretty nice. There’s five sanitary units.

⁸¹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 51.

⁸² Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 42.

⁸³ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 338.

⁸⁴ Railsback, “A *Twenty-First-Century Grapes of Wrath: Jesmyn Ward's Salvage the Bones*,” 184.

Each one elects a Central Committee man. Now that committee makes the laws. What they say goes.”⁸⁵ He further explains that the police cannot enter the camp without a proper warrant. This proves that the migrants or any other people from the working class do not need organization from the higher class. Even though it is a government camp, the local committees are fully capable of making their own rules and laws, obey them and keep order without intervention by the higher class.

Another example of the working class taking the power is one of the main characters. It is Tom Joad. Tom, who is on parole, is willing to risk his own life to fight for the rights of the working class. After Tom kills Jim Casy’ killer, the family must move from their current spot and finds shelter in boxcars, along with jobs. Tom hides in a cave nearby, Ma comes to visit and has a conversation with Tom. He explains to Ma his thoughts,

I 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 theirself; 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 [...] Ma, I been thinkin’ a hell of a lot, thinkin’ about our people livin’ like pigs, an’ the good rich lan’ layin’ fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan’ good farmer is starvin’. An’ I been wonderin’ if all our folks got together an’ yelled, like them fellas yelled [...]”⁸⁶

Then, Tom proceeds to tell Ma how he will do it, as a ghost, which was already described in the Transcendental phalanx part of the thesis. Thus, Tom starts thinking about how he could help the situation and how people like him are living in comparison with the rich and apparently powerful people. He realizes that it is possible to live by the rules that the people make themselves and they do not need any people in higher positions to intervene. He realizes that the working class can hold the power.

⁸⁵ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 391-2.

⁸⁶ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 571.

2.6 American Dream

The term American Dream was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *Epic of America*, which was written in 1931 during the Great Depression. Adams used to be a worker on Wall Street, and he was saving money to become a writer.⁸⁷ In *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes* (2014), authors Rank, Hirschl and Foster describe the American Dream as a certain guidebook that shapes the way people envision their lives to unravel a certain way. Furthermore, they explain that the dream is different for each person, however, the vision is if they work hard and follow their opportunities life gives them, they will reach the goal of a successful life. What is more, the authors describe the American Dream as an important part of the identity of the American citizens.⁸⁸ Additionally, Jim Cullen quotes James Truslow Adams in his work *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (2004) and Adams says that the American Dream is “[...] for all our citizens of every rank [...]”⁸⁹ In short, the belief that the American Dream is that everybody is equal, and everybody has the same opportunity to be happy and successful regardless of their social, racial, geographical or any origin. However, they must work hard for it and seize their opportunities. The characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) display signs of the American Dream several times.

As was mentioned, one part of the American Dream is the belief that if a person works hard enough, they will eventually get what they dream of. More specifically, their own business, where they would be their own boss. The truck driver, who picks up Tom Joad on his way home from prison, is this person. He talks to Tom about what it is like to be a truck driver, how hard it is on the road and how it drives other truck drivers crazy. When Tom offers him a drink, the truck driver refuses and says, “[...] I’m thinkin’ of takin’ one of them correspondence school courses. [...] Then I won’t drive no truck. Then I’ll tell other guys to drive trucks.”⁹⁰ And still, he refuses to drink, even when Tom continues to offer, because he does not want to mess up his studying. The truck driver perfectly embodies this part of the American dream. He is tired of driving trucks and being constantly on the road. So, he works hard to achieve his dream

⁸⁷ Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, 3.

⁸⁸ Rank, Hirschl and Foster, *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*, 1.

⁸⁹ Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, 4.

⁹⁰ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 16.

to be a mechanical engineer, have his own business and tell other people how to do the job.

Another part of the American Dream is to be happy, have a good house and be able to provide enough food for a family. Ma Joad is one of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), who expresses this wish for her and her family. Ma expresses her dream about California to Tom Joad before they start driving there. The Joad family has lost their home and they were living at Uncle John's house. Ma says, "[I]f we all get jobs an' all work-maybe we can get one of them little white houses. An' the little fellas go out an' pick oranges right off the tree."⁹¹ Ma, as the mother and caretaker of the Joad family, simply wants her family to have some happiness. Through hard and honest work, she believes that the family can achieve the dream. Dream of having a roof over their heads and enough food.

Finally, another part of the American dream, which is expressed in the novel, is simple happiness and freedom. The character, who expresses this is Grampa Joad. Even though, he is a fierce man and wants to work to provide for his family, he still has a simple dream. The Joad family sat down for a meal after Tom found them the Uncle John's house. They were catching up with Tom and, talking about California. Grampa, surprisingly at this point, still seems excited about the idea of California. He says, "Gonna get me a whole big bunch of grapes off a bush, or whatever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin."⁹² To sum up, Grampa's dream is simple. He wants to get to California and live a simple and happy life, where he can enjoy all the fruit he can.

⁹¹ Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 124.

⁹² Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 112.

3 IN DUBIOUS BATTLE

In Dubious Battle (1936) is a lesser known novel set in the Great Depression era in the United States by John Steinbeck. This novel was first published in 1936. The author portrays a story about strikes and the participants in a fictional valley in California, however, based on real events. The story follows two main characters Mac and Jim, who work in a union that organizes strikes. In the beginning, they travel to Torgas Valley to help to organize a strike for the fruit pickers against the Growers' Association, whose wages and work conditions are inconvenient. Along the way, the two men and their group of strikers encounter several battles with the law or opponents, who represent the Association.

3.1 Meaning of the title

First, this part of the thesis about *In Dubious Battle* (1936) will be focused on the meaning of the novel's title. Similarly, to *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) it also has a meaning that ties to the story. The name of the title of the novel is inspired by a poem called *Paradise Lost* (1667) written by an English poet John Milton. It is written as an epigraph to the novel. This is an excerpt from the poem:

Innumerable force of Spirits armed,
That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,
His utmost power with adverse power opposed
In Dubious Battle on the plains of Heaven,
And shook His throne. What though the field be lost?
All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?⁹³

The fact that the story is about workers and strikers striking against the Growers' Association, means that they are in a battle. A battle for fair wages and work equality. What is more, in *Solidarity Forever: The Historical Background of John Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle* (2015), author J. F. Dawson not only describes the poem's narrative about Satan and God. He also, elaborates on the relation between the title and the novel. Dawson argues that in this Steinbeck's novel the battle is not dubious because of the labor feud being

⁹³ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 99.

wrong, but for the reason that the strikers may not win their battle in the end.⁹⁴ Furthermore, in one of Steinbeck's letters to Mavis McIntosh, the author himself notes that the name of the novel gives it "a kind of an active mood."⁹⁵ He is, undoubtedly, referring to the action the strikers take against their enemies. Thus, as was said before, the name of the title is closely connected to the story. It seems that Steinbeck does not indicate a wrongful doing by the strikers. Rather, the author is referring to how their story will probably play out.

3.2 Setting

As opposed to *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the setting in *In Dubious Battle* (1936) is not tied specifically to the characters from the story. Although, for the most part, the story is happening in a fictional place called the Torgas Valley in Central California, it is inspired by a real place and real events.

First, the author John Steinbeck was born and raised in California. He has a bond to this state and thus, it seems natural that this story and, his other stories take place there.

More specifically, John Steinbeck was born in the Salinas Valley in California. In a letter addressed to his friend George Albee in 1933, Steinbeck wrote "I think I would like to write the story of this whole valley [...]. [S]o that it would be the valley of the world."⁹⁶ Even though the story from *In Dubious Battle* (1936) is not specifically set in the Salinas Valley, it is still set in his home state. He was infatuated and inspired with his place of birth and set his stories in California.

Pursuing this further, John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) is inspired by real events and real places. Actual strikers organized by workers in California. In *John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of "In Dubious Battle"* (1980), Jackson J. Benson and Anne Loftis argue that the power and depth of his stories could be achieved only through truthful storytelling with stories taken directly from life itself. He did so through careful observation of his surroundings and the setting in his stories are the ones he was familiar with and described in detail.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the two authors explain that John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936) are a mashup of two actual events, "[...] the Peach Strike on the Tagus Ranch in

⁹⁴ Dawson, "Solidarity Forever: The Historical Background of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*," 144.

⁹⁵ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 105.

⁹⁶ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 73.

⁹⁷ Benson and Loftis, "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of *"In Dubious Battle"*," 196.

Tulare County in August 1933, and [...] the Cotton Strike of October 1933 [...].”⁹⁸

Thus, for the reason that John Steinbeck wanted his storytelling to be rooted in truth and inspired by real events and places, the story of *In Dubious Battle* (1936) is exactly that. Steinbeck wrote the story about the strikers in Torgas Valley based on two real events that happened in California in the 1930s during the Great Depression.

3.3 Group vs. Individual

This section will analyze *In Dubious Battle* (1936), again using Steinbeck’s phalanx to show the difference between a group and an individual. More specifically, how people work better in unity in the novel rather than the individual person.

3.3.1 The Importance of Group Explored Through Steinbeck’s Argument of Phalanx

In *In Dubious Battle* (1936), Steinbeck again uses his phalanx theory to show that when people work as a unit, the results are much better. This time, in this novel, the group is different from *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), where a lot of the times it is family members who need to work together. In this story, it is practically a group of strangers, who have the same goal of better work conditions and pay equality. And whenever they see mistreatment being done to them or to one of their own, they act as one.

As was mentioned before, John Steinbeck’s Argument of phalanx aims to show that all men are stronger together as one unit, rather than as lonesome individuals working for themselves. Steinbeck himself loosely describes the phalanx to his friend George Albee in a letter. The author theorizes that a man is a unit consisting of a complex arrangement of cells.⁹⁹ Then, he continues on to describe the man’s nature, “[h]e also arranges himself into larger units, which I have called the phalanx.”¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, Marcia Salazar explains, with reference to *In Dubious Battle* (1936), that the optimal phalanx “[...] is one in which the members act as individuals and at the same time contribute creatively to the formation of a harmoniously integrated whole.”¹⁰¹ John Steinbeck describes a man as a unit on its own, however, this already

⁹⁸ Benson and Loftis, “*John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of “In Dubious Battle”*,” 202.

⁹⁹ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ Steinbeck and Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, 79.

¹⁰¹ Salazar, “*John Steinbeck’s Phalanx Theory*,” 100.

formed unit has a natural need and instinct to form into a group called phalanx. In *In Dubious Battle* (1936), the characters are practically strangers, who are used to live just for themselves. However, in this story, they individually or collectively work to contribute to the greater good of the working class.

The characters in this story show and prove that their power and their strength is in unity. Moreover, how they can unify to protect their people. This section will provide several examples from the novel. Mac travels with Jim to the Torgas Valley, where according to Mac, the men are not being fairly treated in their jobs. Mac and Jim then want to convince the local working men to organize a strike. Jim starts working at an apple orchard and meets Dan. A seventy-one-year-old man, who just wants to do his job and does not want to hear about any strikes.

At one point, Dan falls off a ladder that the workers use to pick the apples. Afterwards, he cannot get up and it seems that his hip is broken. The men are angry. “Look at that ladder! That’s what they make us work on!”¹⁰² Before they were just working uninterested in the conditions, but now their attention has shifted. Mac and Jim start working quickly when they see the angry men. They visit Al, their acquaintance, who owns a food wagon and his father has a farm with a land the striking men could camp on. They visit Anderson, Al’s father and he agrees with the men staying there. Meanwhile, back at the orchard, London was elected a chairman of the large group and all the men agreed to stop picking apples and not return to work. Thanks to Dan’s injury they realized how badly they are treated. Furthermore, they all decide to unite and start a strike. Therefore, the men use their instinct to make a phalanx and fight when they see that one of their own is hurt by the terrible work conditions.

In addition to this claim, there is another instance, where when the men get riled up because of mistreatment, they group up and make things happen. After the events at the apple orchard and before moving to the Anderson’s farm, the leading men are visited by a superintendent. He offers London a job as his assistant for five dollars a day and fifty dollars to Mac and Jim for leaving the valley.

Mac, being experienced with strikes and the nature of men, offers to let all the men vote on the superintendent’s offer. He says, “We’ll take a vote on whether you get that five dollar job and-then-we’ll try to keep the guys from lynchin’ this gent here.”¹⁰³ The superintendent gets scared and leaves. After he leaves, Mac along with others stand

¹⁰² Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 99.

¹⁰³ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 130.

in front of all the men and tell them how the ‘super’ wanted to con them. He goes on to explain that there is a farm with a land they can camp on and that this is the only way they can win. Suddenly, the men synchronize and start getting ready for the move. They are “[...] filled with a terrible joy, a bloody, lustful joy.”¹⁰⁴

Because they would be cheated by the seemingly powerful people from above, the men unite. They are ready to make their next move and they are ready to make it together.

Importantly, there is a character in the story that directly speaks on the nature of group-man and how he wants to see them operate. This character is Doc Burton. He came to aid Mac and his men in case of injuries but will not participate in the strikes himself. Mac sits down with Doc and they begin a conversation. Mac questions the doctor why he is always helping them medically but never participates because he is not a Party man and whether he even believes in their cause. Doc explains that as a doctor he does not want to see things as good or bad because that may blind his judgement. Then, they continue their conversation and talk about the men. Specifically, the nature of group-men. Doc says,

I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you.¹⁰⁵

Thus, similarly to John Steinbeck's writing in his letter, Doc Burton talks about the character of group-men as an organism of cells united.

On the contrary, there is evidence in the novel that when men do not have anything to fight for or protect, they are losing their group-man mentality. Howard Levant explains this nature of men in *The Unity of "In Dubious Battle": Violence and Dehumanization* (1965). He says, “Men need the stress of violent emotion ("blood") to become group-man [...].”¹⁰⁶ After several events, which are not important for this section to describe, the men from Mac's camp are in a waiting period. For a while, they did not have a strike, they did not work and there is not enough food. They are getting restless without anything to rile them. They are questioning their chairman London,

¹⁰⁴ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 144 – 145.

¹⁰⁶ Levant, “*The Unity of "In Dubious Battle": Violence and Dehumanization*,” 26.

whom they believed, and they think he is hiding food. Some men with families started to leave in the middle of the night. When Mac and London talk about an upcoming fight, Mac admits “If there’s a fight, [...], they’ll put up a hell of a battle. But if we lose a man first, I wouldn’t be surprised to see them hit for the trees.”¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the men’s morale is falling apart and so is their nature of unification. Even, Mac as an experienced striker and organizer of strikes fears that his men will fall apart if they see that they are on the losing side.

3.3.2 Individual

Pursuing this further and supporting Steinbeck’s phalanx theory, this part will examine the individual in the novel. Admittedly, there is only one example in the story about an individual suffering for not being a part of something larger. That is Jim Nolan. The novel starts with Jim going to a job interview, after being released from jail, to become a member of the Party. He is interviewed by Harry Nilson, a man, who even knows his father and remembers that he was one of the toughest strikers. Also, Harry finds out that Jim’s mother recently died and that he has no place to stay.

While Harry is interviewing Jim, he notices something odd about him. He even asks if he is on drugs. Jim says that he is not and, he does not even drink. Furthermore, Harry questions Jim and why he wants to become a member. Jim answers that when he was in jail before met some Party members and it seemed like they had their lives in order. Furthermore, he says, “They were working toward something. I want to work toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again.”¹⁰⁸ It is obvious that Jim is suffering in the beginning because he is alone. He has lost so much and is beaten down by life. He feels dead inside and the thought of joining the Party and becoming a member of a group makes him excited. Thus, Jim, as an example of an individual, evidently suffers without the group-man.

3.4 Morality

In this following part, the thesis will focus on displays of morality in the novel. First, the morality will be explored through Utilitarianism. More specifically, Act

¹⁰⁷ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 304.

¹⁰⁸ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 10.

Utilitarianism. Then, it will focus on other acts of morality that do not display Utilitarianism.

To begin with, Utilitarianism is an ethical theory, first developed by Jeremy Bentham. Two authors of *Ethics for A-level* (2017), Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher describe Jeremy Bentham's moral theory of Utilitarianism. They explain that Utilitarianism, as an ethical theory and an outlook on what is morally right or wrong, depends on the outcome of a specific action done by someone.¹⁰⁹ Also, they call Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism consequential because the moral outcome of an action is decided by the consequence the action brings. The authors use the following example, "If more pleasure follows as a consequence of "Action A" rather than "Action B", then according to the fundamental axiom of Utilitarianism "Action A" should be undertaken and is morally right; choosing "Action B" would be morally wrong."¹¹⁰ What is more, this Bentham's ethical theory is also called Act Utilitarianism. Furthermore, it is also called, "extreme or direct utilitarianism."¹¹¹ To summarize, Bentham's ethical theory of Utilitarianism is based on moral actions and its consequences. These moral actions are judged on the scale as moral or immoral depending on the consequences. In the novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936), Utilitarianism or Act Utilitarianism can be seen through the actions of a certain character.

3.4.1 Morality Explored Through Act Utilitarianism

Based on an analysis of Utilitarianism in *In Dubious Battle* (1936), there is only one character whose moral actions unconsciously show signs of Act Utilitarianism and that is the strike leader, Mac.

Mac, as was mentioned is the leader of the men. Even though he chooses London to be the official leader, but only because the men already know him. Mac is the one behind all the decisions. Through these decisions, he displays his utility thinking.

Mac is very radical regarding his cause. He truly believes in it and is capable of anything. Even if it means losing lives along the way, he only desires a positive outcome. When Mac and Jim arrive at Torgas Valley, they need a way to start infiltrate themselves amongst the men, who live and work there. They come across London and his men. London has a daughter-in-law Lisa, who is about to give birth but there is no

¹⁰⁹ Dimmock and Fisher, "Utilitarianism," 13.

¹¹⁰ Dimmock and Fisher, "Utilitarianism," 14.

¹¹¹ Han, "'I Want to Make 'Em Happy': Utilitarian Philosophy in Steinbeck's Fiction," 22.

doctor around. Mac tells them that he has experience with delivering babies and London agrees and lets Mac help Lisa. All goes well. London is satisfied and so he is willing to accept Mac and Jim into their group and help them get work.

A little later, Mac admits to Jim that he has no experience with birth, he only knows that everything needs to be sterile when it comes to childbirth. Jim says that it looked very convincing and that Mac acted sure, to which Mac replies, “We’ve got to use whatever material comes to us. [...] ‘Course it was nice to help the girl, but hell, even if it killed her—we’ve got to use anything.”¹¹² Thus, Mac was willing to risk the lives of Lisa and her baby, only in order to infiltrate him and Jim into London’s group. In his eyes, his action is considered morally acceptable because it had a good outcome and it did not matter anymore that two people could have died.

Additionally, Mac seemingly does not care about other people’s lives, even when it is people he knows longer and frequently works with them. It seems that Mac has been working with Joy in the Party for a while, he knows his history, he knows his personality, he tries to help him out when he gets in trouble. For example, he helps him out of jail. However, when Joy gets shot by the police when he arrives at Torgas Valley, Mac does not mourn. It seems the only thing important to him is the effect that Joy’s death brings for Mac’s cause. Mac wants to keep Joy’s body, “We’ve got to see him to step our guys up, to keep ‘em together. This’ll stick ‘em together, this’ll make ‘em fight.”¹¹³ One of the men, Dakin, accuses Mac of being cold-hearted for not letting his dead friend rest. Mac answers, “Joy didn’t want no rest. Joy wanted to work, and he didn’t know how.”¹¹⁴ For Mac, the only effect Joy’s death has on him, is that he is satisfied it helped his cause. He does not care that he lost someone he knew or an experienced striker. The consequence of the action is what matters.

Furthermore, Mac is not sorrowful and acts as a consequentialist, even in case somebody’s property and crop gets damaged. Mr. Anderson agreed to lend his land to the cause knowing there is a possibility he will lose his farm and his crop if everything goes wrong. However, he was promised his apples picked. Also, his apples would sell for more because of the striking men not picking apples anywhere else.

At one point in the story, Anderson’s barn is burned down with all his crops. Even though Mac says to Anderson he is sorry, he later confesses to Jim, “You see a

¹¹² Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 60.

¹¹³ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 164.

¹¹⁴ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 164.

guy hurt, [...], an' you think, what the hell's the use of it. An' then you think of the millions starving, and it's all right again."¹¹⁵ Again, Mac does not care about what gets lost and who gets hurt in the process, just as long the outcome is good for the masses.

Finally, Mac shows his Utilitarian ways at the very end of the story. He and Jim are called to see a hurt Doc laying somewhere in the field in their camp. They are walking there but they are surprised by a gunfire. Mac orders Jim to lay down and he does it as well. After a while, when the gunfire stops, Mac raises his head and looks at Jim, who is laying down beside him with his face on the ground. Jim was shot in the face and is dead.

Mac carries Jim back to the camp on his shoulders, displays his body on a podium in a way that everybody can see Jim's face. Even though Mac is a little bit shaken by the gruesome death of his friend, he still does not waste any time showing it off and helps his case. In this way, Mac uses Jim's death to motivate the men into more action. Once again, not caring about his friend's or colleague's death and only about the outcome. Mac proves his Act Utilitarian ways, which are drastic and do not care about individuals, however, they are rooted in an intention to help all people and their cause.

3.4.2 Other Acts of Morality

On the contrary, there are several acts of morality, which do not display Utilitarian elements and display simple acts of human kindness. These moral acts will be shown through several characters. In the first place, Doc Burton is one of the characters whose very crucial to the story. Being a doctor is one element, but he also willingly chooses to help the men and expects nothing. At one point in the story, the strike is going awry. Mac confides in the doctor that their food supply is cut off and with the upcoming rain, Mac feels the men will break. Furthermore, he comments that it is surprising how the Doc is probably the last man to be standing, even though he does not really believe in the cause. Doc answers,

I guess I just believe they're men, and not animals. Maybe if I went into a kennel and the dogs were hungry and sick and dirty, and maybe, if I could help those dogs, I would. Wouldn't be their fault they were that way. You couldn't say, 'Those dogs are that way because they haven't any ambition.

¹¹⁵ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 331.

They don't save their bones. Dogs always are that way.' No, you'd try to clean them up and feed them. I guess that's the way it is with me. I have some skill in helping men, and when I see some who need help, I just do it. I don't think about it much.¹¹⁶

According to Doc Burton's analogy, he simply explains that this is what he does. He has a certain skill and he uses it to help others without even thinking about it.

Pursuing this further, another character whose morals are unquestionable is Al Anderson. Al Anderson, a food wagon owner and son of Mr. Anderson, who lends his property to the men to camp on. Jim and Mac meet Al right after they arrive at Torgas Valley when they visit his wagon. Al is on their list of active sympathizers to their cause and they know he will help them and feed them. Because of the fear of losing his business, Al does not want to actively participate in any strikes. He says, "A man sees the way conditions is, and injustice, and things-and if he's got any brains he comes to it."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Al leads Mac and Jim to his father. He knows his father is not a sympathizer and, knows that his father's farm along with his own wagon could be ruined, but still helps the two men. Thus, Al, even though very cautiously is a person with good morals. Even though he and his father could lose their property and business, he decides to act morally.

3.5 Concept of Power and Class

The concept of power and class is the same as in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The higher-class people seem to have all the power over the lower working-class people and in this section, it will be shown how they use it. As well as in the previous novel, in this novel, it is proven a lot of times that those who seem to be powerless can be powerful.

To begin with, one of the examples where the powerful abuse their power is food and money related. Food is one of the most important sources a person needs to survive. Yet the owners the men work for are profiting from the working men and women. When Jim starts working at the apple orchard, he meets Old Dan, who later falls off the ladder and injures himself, which helps the strike. Before this happens, Jim

¹¹⁶ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 194 – 195.

¹¹⁷ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 105.

is getting information from Dan. Dan mentions that after work, he will go to the store to buy food, but complains that it is overpriced. Jim sees through this strategy and says, “Women work all day, men work all day; and the owner charges three cents extra for a can of beans because the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries.”¹¹⁸ Consequently, the owners are taking advantage of their workers. They are counting on the people being so tired and hungry that they will buy their overpriced food rather than travel to a further store.

Furthermore, another person in a higher position abuses his power and uses money as a power tool to get information about an upcoming strike. There is a checker at the apple orchard, a man, who checks the apples for bruises and whether they are good enough to sell. He also has control over the pay of the workers. Whenever someone brings a bucket with only a slightly bruised apple, he can dump it and decide that the worker will not get paid for that bucket.

One day, the checker has a conversation with Jim. He tells him how he can see the men being irritated with the work. Furthermore, he confides in Jim and admits that his superintendent told him there was something going on and to find out about it. Also, he has a job offer for Jim that would pay better. He keeps pressuring him, “You get the dope for me and I’ll put in a word for you on that checker’s job, fifty cents an hour.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, the checker offers him five extra dollars. Later, the checker tries to get information from Jim about the angry men again. Jim tells the checker that the men are mad because a worker was sold a spoiled can of fish. The checker is satisfied with this answer, however, does not pay Jim his promised five dollars. It is evident that the checker feels superior to the other workers. He uses promises of a better job and more money to get what he wants. He thinks that the working-class man, Jim, in this situation, will break and do anything for an improvement of his position.

A similar event happens a little later. Person of a higher position coming to the leading men of the strike and using money as a tool to get his way. After Old Dan’s injury, all the men working in the apple orchard decide not to work anymore under bad conditions. They set up a camp and await a move to Mr. Anderson’s farm that Mac set up. Then, a superintendent comes to speak with London, Mac, and Jim. He has a proposition, which is that London can go back to work if he gets rid of Mac and Jim. He says to London, “You get the men back to work and you’ll get a steady job here as

¹¹⁸ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 71.

¹¹⁹ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 87.

assistant superintendent at five dollars a day.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, he offers “Fifty dollars apiece if they get out of the Valley,”¹²¹ referring to Jim and Mac. They all refuse the offers and Mac threatens the superintendent that he will tell all the other men about this. The superintendent aware of the power of angry men decides to leave. In this case, the superintendent, a person in a higher position, is abusing his power and tries to persuade the leaders with money hoping they will betray their men. The leaders not only refuse but also show the man that they are not afraid and that he cannot manipulate them.

Finally, after several unsuccessful tries to break up the strike and get the men to work, another man in a very high position tries to abuse his power to persuade the men. A man called Bolter arrives at the camp at Anderson’s property to negotiate with London. He introduces himself as the new president of the Fruit Growers' Association. At first, he tries to appeal to them by flattering, he says, “Give American working men something reasonable to listen to, and they’ll listen.”¹²² He offers the men to come back to work the following day for twenty cents and without any grudge. The men, however, demand a raise. Bolter sneakily says that he appealed to his colleagues to approve the raise, but they did not. London and the other are not satisfied and refuse to go back to work. Bolter says that even though they do not want to fight the men and continues, “But if we do have to fight, we have weapons. [...] And of course we may have to call troops, if we need them.”¹²³ The leaders of the strike do not get scared and send Bolter away.

As you can see, even a man from a very high position tried to persuade the men back to work and threatened them. When he realized that the men would not for such a little pay and did not back down, he decided to abuse his power to threaten them. However, not even in this case did the men surrender and they stood their ground.

3.6 American Dream

This part will focus on the theme of the American Dream in *In Dubious Battle* (1936). As opposed to *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), this novel does not explicitly and in detail show this theme through the characters. However, from their actions, it is evident, they have it. As was mentioned before, the American Dream is a concept that was

¹²⁰ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 129.

¹²¹ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 129.

¹²² Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 244.

¹²³ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 249.

coined in the 1930s during the Great Depression. To be more specific, it a belief that if a person works hard enough in their life, they will reach success and happiness. In fact, they can reach this goal regardless of their background or origin. In *In Dubious Battle* (1936), the characters do not specifically express their dreams. However, their actions speak for them. Frederic I. Carpenter in *John Steinbeck: American Dreamer* (1941) elaborates that “the Communists dream of the new society.”¹²⁴

In the first place, all the working men in the novel have an American dream. When the situation was right and with a little push, they stopped working to demand better wages. They worked hard enough already, and they take a stance against the system. They sacrifice their current pays because they believe they can achieve better results. The men were working hard for not enough money to support themselves or their families. Then, they realized that if they work hard enough in a different way, in the strike, they might achieve a better future.

Additionally, there are two main characters, who work harder for this dream harder than anybody. Mac and Jim. As for Jim, his intentions are clear from the beginning when in his job interview for the Party he states that he feels dead inside and wants to work toward something. As soon as he is admitted to the Party, he is eager to work, especially, in the field. He does not waste time and is not scared; he wants to help the cause as much as he can. Even after one day at the Party office, he admits that “It seemed a good thing to be doing. It seemed to have some meaning.”¹²⁵ In the end, even Jim’s death is beneficial to the cause, when Mac uses his dead body to motivate the other men.

On the other hand, Mac’s primary intentions are not that clear. We know that he was working for the Party for a long time, but the primary reason is unknown. However, through his actions, it is obvious that Mac is committed to the cause and wants a better society. Thanks to his experience, he is the one organizing and making decisions in Torgas Valley. He will do anything for the cause to be successful. In conclusion, Jim’s eagerness and Mac’ dedication prove that through their hard work on the cause they dream for improvement of the society and better job conditions for all men.

¹²⁴ Carpenter, “*John Steinbeck: American Dreamer*,” 462.

¹²⁵ Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, 25.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to find out how did John Steinbeck portray the working-class in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936) during the Great Depression. The analysis was done through several themes and the characters' actions were analyzed. To be able to sufficiently analyze John Steinbeck's portrayal of the Great Depression through the characters in the novel, the historical background was necessary to provide. Therefore, it is described in the first part of the thesis.

First of all, the analysis of the meaning of the title of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) showed how it is tied to the story itself and how the author shows not only the anger of the mistreated people, but also how their mistreatment led to their deaths. The analysis of the setting and the importance of land showed the suffering of the land itself caused by the natural disaster the Dust Bowl. Equally, important, it demonstrated the ties between people and their land. The characters' died because they were torn from their homeland because of the oppression from the higher-class people. Next, Through the analysis of unity explored through John Steinbeck's phalanx theory, the thesis shows that people work better and achieve better results in their lives through cooperation and understanding. Also, through phalanx, the characters showed their unity with the land and the sufficiency it has for their own mentality and their actions in the future.

Moreover, morality was another important theme explored in the thesis. The characters' actions proved that even through hard times they never lost their morals. In certain cases, they were either mourning their close ones or they did not have enough food for themselves, but they still showed kindness to others. Furthermore, through analysis of the concept of power and class, it was shown how the people in the position of power treated and manipulated the lower-class people. On the other hand, further analysis of the novel showed that the working-class people were able to either work perfectly with their own rules and without the intervention of the people on a higher position or they show their determination to take a stance against them. In the analysis of the theme of the American Dream, it was proved that even in a crisis, the characters did not lose their ability to dream. Whether it was their dreams about a better job, a better house, or a simpler and happier life.

Secondly, the analysis of the novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) was presented. Similarly, to the first novel, the meaning of the title revealed its ties to the story and

Steinbeck's intention with the characters. The setting of the story not only revealed the author's ties to his homeland but also his inspiration by real events and by real struggles that the American citizens had to go through. The unity explored through theory of phalanx analysis, again, demonstrated the necessity and the advantage of a unity between people. In this case, the characters were strangers who just met, and they still proved that cooperation is very sufficient.

Even though in this novel, the main character portrays a different kind of morality, which was rooted in Utilitarianism, he still does it for the greater good of all people and for their cause. In contrast, it was shown through other characters that even in the Great Depression, they can be moral and help other people without any casualties. Analysis of the concept between power and class showed how the people in higher positions think they can use their power against the working-class to get their way. Nevertheless, the characters portraying the working-class show their strong will and do not succumb. The last themes analyzed in this novel was the American Dream. The characters again show that, through their actions, they have a dream of a better life in a better society and that they do not give up on their dreams.

In conclusion, the author John Steinbeck does portray the Great Depression in the United States as a terrible crisis that took people's lands, homes, and jobs. Furthermore, he demonstrates how people in higher positions used this crisis to their advantage. However, Steinbeck's portrayal of the working-class is different. He demonstrates on his characters that even through hard times, people can be moral, they can achieve great results through unity, they can overpower the powerful and furthermore, they can still have their dreams and work hard for them.

RESUMÉ

John Steinbeck je americký spisovatel, který je také částečně známý svými díly, které jsou zasazeny v období Velké hospodářské krize v třicátých letech dvacátého století ve Spojených státech. Tato bakalářská práce se v první části zaměřuje především na tuto krizi a na její vliv na americkou pracující třídu. Posléze jsou analyzovány dvě novely od Johna Steinbecka, jejichž děj probíhá v období Velké hospodářské krize a postavami jsou lidé patřící do pracující třídy. Tyto novely jsou *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) a *In Dubious Battle* (1936).

Nejprve jsem v první části popisovala život a zaměstnanost pracující třídy ve Spojených státech během a po první světové válce. Dále, jsem tyto aspekty rozebrala ve dvacátých letech před Velkou hospodářskou krizí, tyto léta jsou také známé pod názvem Bouřlivé dvacítky. Během těchto let, většina amerických obyvatel zažívala období zábavy a osobní svobody. Život ve městech se zlepšil nejen v tomto ohledu, ale také v oblasti zaměstnanosti. Nezaměstnanost klesla o několik procent a mzda se postupně zvyšovala až do roku 1929. Také jsem uvedla, že počet protestů za lepší pracovní podmínky se v tomto období výrazně zmenšil. V této části jsem dále popsala část života Johna Steinbecka, který v tomto období strávil několik let v New Yorku a měl možnost využít tohoto období pracovní prosperity. Zatímco, se ale život pracující třídy ve velkých městech zlepšil, tak tato společenská vrstva v rurálních oblastech stále trpěla. Američtí farmáři zápasili s vyděláním si na živobytí a spoustu lidí stále neměli elektřinu. John Steinbeck se během svého života setkal s takovými lidmi, soucítil s nimi, sbíral jejich příběhy a také je pak promítnul ve svých dílech.

V další sekci jsem se zaměřila na dvě příčiny Velké hospodářské krize. Nejprve na pád burzy v New Yorku, a především na to, jako vypadala burza před pádem a následně na samotný pád. Poté jsem se zaměřila na popis písečných bouří, které sužovaly několik států v Americe nazývané the Dust Bowl. Popisovala jsem, jak tyto bouře vznikaly, jak ničily farmářskou úrodu a jak nutily lidi migrovat do jiných států, aby našli lepší podmínky pro život.

Následně jsem se věnovala popisu dopadu Velké hospodářské krize na pracující třídu. Především na vzrůst nezaměstnanosti a s tím spojený i psychický stav amerických občanů, kteří přišli o jistotu v životě. Dále se tato část týká i vzrůstu protestů, které během krize rostly rok od roku v řádech tisíců. Na toto navazuji spojením mezi protesty a dílem Johna Steinbecka, *In Dubious Battle* (1936), kde jsou protesty za lepší pracovní podmínky hlavním tématem.

Bakalářská práce poté pokračuje analýzou již zmíněných děl od Johna Steinbecka. Nejprve je to dílo *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Začala jsem analýzou významu názvu tohoto díla, kdy popisuji inspiraci za výběrem názvu a také, jak se samotný název váže k příběhu. Poté se zaměřuji na analýzu důležitosti prostředí, a to především na čtyři různé aspekty. Důležitost půdy jako takové a důležitost domoviny pro lidi, kteří na ní vyrůstají celý život. Následně na dvě různá prostředí, která hrají velkou roli v příběhu a těmi jsou dálnice, na které postavy cestují a Kalifornie, což je jejich destinace. S použitím teorie phalanx od autora Johna Steinbecka analyzuji nutnost a důležitost chovat se jako celek. Tento fakt dosahuji rozbořením chování postav v knize, kdy několikrát dokazují, že týmová práce se vyplatí a pomůže efektivněji dosáhnout požadovaného výsledku. Dále se zaměřuji i na transcendentální phalanx, kdy popisují důležitost jednoty člověka buď s přírodou nebo podstatou všeho lidstva. A jako protiklad ukazují nevýhodu individualismu neboli samotářů, kteří bez jednoty s ostatními lidmi trpí. Podobným způsobem, tedy rozbořením chování postav, analyzuji jejich morálku. A to především to, jak postavy dokážou prokázat své morální hodnoty i v době krize, což znamená, když sami nemají například práci ani dost jídla, ale podělí se s hladovými, nebo když truchlí za své blízké, ale přesto dokážou pomoci ostatním. V další sekci se soustředuji na analýzu mezi mocí a třídou. Především analyzuji, jak vyšší společenská vrstva utiskuje a drží moc nad pracující třídou pomocí peněz a práce, aby mohli zajistit své rodiny. Na druhou stranu ukazují, jak pracující třída dokáže převzít moc sama za sebe a fungovat bez pravidel, které vyšší třída lidí určuje. A jako poslední v analýze *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), rozebírám, co je to Americký sen a jak ho postavy z tohoto díla promítají ve svém životě.

V poslední části bakalářské práce analyzuji dílo Johna Steinbecka s názvem *In Dubious Battle* (1936). V souvislosti s tímto dílem analyzuji podobná témata jako u předchozího díla, pouze s drobnými rozdíly, kvůli přizpůsobení k ději. Nejprve tedy opět analyzuji název díla, jeho inspiraci a to, jak se jeho význam váže k samotnému příběhu. Posléze se věnuji prostředí příběhu, které, v tomto případě, je inspirováno skutečnými událostmi neboli skutečnými protesty v Kalifornii. Dále s pomocí teorie phalanx od Johna Steinbecka analyzuji důležitost jednoty. V případě tohoto díla je to jiné, jelikož jsou všechny postavy naprostými cizinci a musí se naučit spolupracovat jako jeden pro svůj účel. Na podporu teorie phalanx pak představuji jednu postavu z díla, která samotou trpí a potřebuje najít význam svého života ve spolupráci se skupinou lidí, kteří pracují jako jeden celek. Podobně jako u předchozího díla analyzuji

morálku postav. Rozdíl je v tom, že aplikuji teorii Utilitarianismu na jednu z hlavních postav a tímto způsobem analyzuji jeho chování a slova. Na druhou stranu, ale také zdůrazňuji i morálku ostatních postav, které nevykazují známky Utilitarianismu, ale jednají pouze z důvodu dobrých mravů. V další sekci analyzuji koncept moci a třídy. Jako předtím ukazuji vyšší vrstvu, která zneužívá svou moc ve svůj prospěch a jako pomůcku k ovlivnění pracující třídy. Jako protiklad zdůrazňuji pracující třídu, která i pod náporom vyšší vrstvy zůstane věrná svým lidem, nenechají se uplatit a dál bojují za svou pravdu a svůj účel. A jako poslední se opět vracím ke konceptu Amerického snu a analyzuji způsob jakým ho postavy v díle projevují.

V závěru jsem témata obou děl shrnula a vysvětlila výsledky jejich analýzy. A to tak, že během analýzy těchto děl a jejich stěžejních témat, autor John Steinbeck dokazuje charakter lidí během celonárodní krize, v tomto případě Velké hospodářské krize. Autor dokazuje, že i v takovém období dokážou lidé prokázat důležitost jednoty, svou morálku, svou moc i když jsou považováni za nižší vrstvu a umění snít a pracovat tvrdě za účelem splnění svých snů.

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ANOTACE

Příjmení a jméno: Kurfürstová Tereza

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: The Great Depression and working-class in novels by John Steinbeck

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Elizabeth Allyn Woock, Ph.D.

Počet stran: 57

Klíčová slova: John Steinbeck, Velká hospodářská krize, pracující třída, Hrozny hněvu, Bitva, americký sen, moc, třída, morálka

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá dvěma díly od autora Johna Steinbecka, *Hrozny hněvu* (1939) a *Bitva* (1936), a zaměřuje se na s nimi spojenou tematiku jako je Velká hospodářská krize a pracující třída ve Spojených státech. První část bakalářské práce se zaměřuje na popis pracující třídy před začátkem této krize. Dále, jsou popsány události, které vedly ke vzniku této krize a její dopad na pracující třídu. Druhá část práce analyzuje význam názvů děl a význam prostředí příběhu, ale především analyzuje stěžejní témata těchto děl a demonstruje je na postavách.

ABSTRACT

Surname and name: Tereza Kurfürstová

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Title of the thesis: The Great Depression and working-class in novels by John Steinbeck

Supervisor: Mgr. Elizabeth Allyn Woock, Ph.D.

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Keywords: John Steinbeck, the Great Depression, working-class, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *In Dubious Battle*, American dream, power, class, morality

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the analysis of two works by John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936), focusing on themes connected with the Great Depression and the working class in the United States. The first part of the thesis describes the working-class before the crisis, then the course of the Great Depression and its impact on the working class. The second part of the thesis analyses the meaning of the titles and the setting of the two works. Furthermore, it analyses themes

such as, group versus individual, morality, power versus class and American dream, and how those themes are manifested through the characters.