

The Grapes Of Wrath By John Steinbeck

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(Book 592 From 1001 Books) - The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck The Grapes of Wrath is an American realist novel written by John Steinbeck and published in 1939. The book won the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and it was cited prominently when Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962. Jul 22, 2016 · Context. The Great Depression; Overview. Not only one of Steinbeck's greatest works, The Grapes of Wrath (1939) has also secured its place as one of the most famous novels in the entire American literary canon. The final piece of Steinbeck's labor trilogy—following In Dubious Battle (1936) and Of Mice and Men (1937)—The Grapes of Wrath was written ... Steinbeck's insistence that The Grapes of Wrath be "keyed into the American scene from the beginning" by reproducing all the verses of "Battle Hymn," ... (November 1999) survey of readers, writers, editors, and academics ranked John Steinbeck as the number one writer among the century's "100 Best" (a list whittled down from more ... 1939: Steinbeck writes The Grapes of Wrath; published to popular acclaim in April. 1940s 1940: Steinbeck wins the Pulitzer Prize for The Grapes of Wrath. 1941: Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. 1943: Steinbeck works with Alfred Hitchcock on Lifeboat. 1945: World War II ends. Steinbeck's sons are born: Thom in 1944, John IV in 1946.

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steinbeck's liberal mixture of native philosophy, common-sense leftist politics, blue-collar radicalism, working-class characters, homespun folk wisdom, and digressive narrative form—all set to a bold, rhythmic style and nervy, raw dialogue—

qualified the novel as the “american book” he had set out to write. the novel's title—from julia ward howe's “battle hymn of the republic”—was clearly in the american grain—and steinbeck, a loyal rooseveltian new deal democrat, liked the song “because it is a march and this book is a kind of march—because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning,” he announced on september 10, 1938, to elizabeth otis, his new york literary agent.

after its arduous composition from late may through late october 1938

(“never worked so hard in my life nor so long before,” steinbeck told carl wilhelmson), the grapes of wrath passed from his wife's typescript to published novel (viking's designers set the novel in janson type-face) in a scant four months. in march 1939, when steinbeck received copies from one of three advance printings, he told pascal covici, his editor at the viking press, that he was “immensely pleased with them.” the novel's impressive physical and aesthetic appearance was the result of its imposing length (619

pages) and elmer hader's striking dust jacket illustration (which pictured the exiled joads looking down from tehachapi pass to lush san joaquin valley).

steinbeck's insistence that the grapes of wrath be “keyed into the american scene from the beginning” by reproducing all the verses of “battle hymn,”

was only partly met: viking press compromised by printing the first page of howe's sheet music on the book's endpapers in an attempt (unsuccessfully, it turned out) to deflect accusations of communism against the novel and its author.

given the drastic plight of the migrant labor situation in california during the depression, steinbeck refused intentionally to write a popular book or to court commercial success. it was ironic, then, that shortly after its official publication date on april 14, 1939 (the fourth anniversary of “black sunday,”

the most devastating of all dust bowl storms), fueled by the nearly 150

reviews—mostly positive—that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and literary journals during the remainder of the year, the grapes of wrath climbed to the top of the bestseller lists for most of the year, selling 428,900

copies in hardcover at \$2.75 each. (in 1941, when sun dial press issued a cloth reprint for a dollar, the publisher announced that more than 543,000

copies of grapes had already been sold.) the grapes of wrath won the 1940

pulitzer prize (steinbeck gave the \$1,000 prize to friend rich lovejoy to encourage his writing career), eventually became a cornerstone of his 1962

nobel prize, and proved itself to be among the most enduring—and controversial—works of fiction by any american author, past or present. in spite of flaws, gaffes, and infelicities its critics have enumerated—or perhaps because of them (general readers tend to embrace the book's mythic soul and are less troubled by its imperfect body)— the grapes of wrath has resolutely entered both the american consciousness and its conscience. few novels can make that claim.

if a literary classic can be defined as a book that speaks directly to readers'

concerns in successive historical and cultural eras, no matter what their critical approaches, methods, or preoccupations are, then surely the grapes of wrath is such a work. each generation of readers has found something new and relevant about it that speaks to its times. you might love it, you might hate it, but you probably won't be indifferent. although steinbeck could not have predicted its success (and was nearly ruined by its roller-coaster notoriety), the fact is that, in the past six-plus decades, the grapes of wrath has sold more than fifteen million copies and currently sells annually 150,000

copies. a graph in book (july/august 2003) indicates that of the fifty bestselling “classic” british and american novels in 2002, grapes ranks eleventh—five spots behind fitzgerald's the great gatsby, but seven ahead of hemingway's the old man and the sea (steinbeck and hemingway are the only writers with three titles each on the list). in that same issue of book, jerome kramer includes grapes as one of the twenty books that changed america. moreover, a recent spate of turn-of-the-century polls, all employing differing, even opposed methodologies, agendas, and criteria, arrived at similar conclusions: surveys by radcliffe publishing course, modern library board, hungry mind review (now ruminator review), san francisco chronicle, heath anthology of american literature newsletter, library journal, and british booksellers waterston's all place the grapes of wrath among the premier works in english of the twentieth century.

moreover, an elaborate writer's digest (november 1999) survey of readers, writers, editors, and academics ranked john steinbeck as the number one writer among the century's “100 best” (a list whittled down from more than seven hundred nominees). the criteria—admittedly slippery—used to judge each author included “influence,” “quality,” and “originality.” even with a healthy dose of critical skepticism thrown into the mix, and a strong awareness of our turn-of-the-century obsession with compiling “best” lists, there is still something more significant at work in these dovetailing independent assessments of grapes' achievement than the mere operation of special pleading, narrow partisanship, demographic distribution, or simpleminded puffery. something more than the vagaries of cultural correctness and identity politics is at work in these polls that keeps steinbeck's novel relevant to the kind of large-scale public conversation that took place in california in 2002, the year of steinbeck's one hundredth birthday, when the state's humanities council, in an unprecedented and ambitious project, invited everyone in the state to read and discuss the novel at 140 public library venues. california's effort was itself part of a nationwide steinbeck centennial honoring the “bard of the people,” which, according to anne keisman, became the “largest single author tribute in american history.”

grapes has also had a charmed life on screen and stage. steinbeck sold the novel's film rights for \$75,000 to producer darryl f. zanuck at 20th century fox. then nunnally johnson scripted a truncated film version, which was nonetheless memorably paced, photographed (by ace cinematographer greg tolland), and acted (henry fonda as tom joad, jane darwell as ma joad, and john carradine as jim casy) under the direction of john ford in 1940. the film was nominated for seven academy awards, and took home two oscars

—ford as best director; darwell as best supporting actress. (a restored dvd version with added historical features, movietone documentary newsreel footage of dust bowl conditions, and extended interpretive commentary by susan shillinglaw and joseph mcbride was released in 2004.) it proved to be a “hard, straight picture . . . that looks and feels like a documentary film and . . . has a hard, truthful ring,” steinbeck reported on december

15,

1939,

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its

hollywood

preview.

(folksinger/songwriter woody guthrie said it was the “best cussed pitcher i ever seen,” and urged readers of his column in people's world, “go to see it and don't miss. you was the star in that picture. ”) frank galati faithfully adapted the novel for his chicago-based steppenwolf company, whose broadway production, featuring gary sinise as tom joad and lois smith as ma joad, won a tony award for best play in 1990.

steinbeck's novel has created legacies in other ways, too. cesar chavez, jim harrison, edward r.

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first published in 1939, steinbeck's pulitzer prize-winning epic of the great depression chronicles the dust bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one oklahoma farm family, the joads—driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the pulitzer prize-winning epic of the great depression, a book that galvanized—and sometimes outraged—millions of readers.

first published in 1939, steinbeck's pulitzer prize-winning epic of the great depression chronicles the dust bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one oklahoma farm family, the joads—driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of california. out of their trials and their repeated collisions against the hard realities of an america divided into haves and have-nots evolves a drama that is intensely human yet majestic in its scale and moral stirring, elemental yet plainspoken, tragic but ultimately stirring in its human dignity. a portrait of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of one woman's stoical strength, the novel captures the horrors of the great depression and probes into the very nature of equality and justice in america. at once a naturalistic epic, captivity narrative, road novel, and transcendental gospel, steinbeck's powerful landmark novel is perhaps the most american of american classics. ...more get a copy

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hardcover, 75th anniversary edition, 479 pages published april 10th 2014 by viking (first published april 14th 1939) more details... original title the grapes of wrath isbn 067001690x (isbn13: 9780670016907) edition language english characters tom joad, rose of sharon joad rivers, ma joad, pa joad, uncle john joad...more, jim casy, al joad, ruthie joad, winfield joad, noah joad, grampa joad, granma joad, connie rivers...less setting oklahoma (united states) california (united states) the united states of america

literary awards pulitzer prize for novel (1940), national book award for fiction (1939), california book award for general literature (silver) (1939), audie award for classic (1999) other editions (712)

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elizabeth hook they shared when they had nothing, shared the last thing they possibly could, but they gave. that last piece summed up the most powerful message i fel...morethey shared when they had nothing, shared the last thing they possibly could, but they gave. that last piece summed up the most powerful message i felt in the book. the one of sharing, when the i becomes the we.a persons dignity can never be robbed from them as long as they have something to give. i loved it, it took my breath away.(less) flag

how did john steinbeck's personal experience with the great depression and the dust bowl migration influence his portrayal of these events in the grapes of wrath? does the book accurately depict the political and economic situations of the time or is there bias?

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whenever i revisit a classic i'm struck by how much more i get out of it now than i did when i was 24 or 19 or, god forbid, 15. giving a book like the grapes of wrath to a 15

and this is a great book. one of the best ever written. this is the rare great american novel, up there with **lonesome dove**, **the catcher in the rye** and **gone with the wind**.

i can only imagine that steinbeck's hands were shaking as he removed the last page from the typewriter (yes, writers used something called typewriters back then). i picture a silent room as he experienced a true moment of awe. i like to think he had tears in his eyes, or that they slid slowly down his face, just as mine did throughout this read. as frost would say, "no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader."

believe me, if you are over 35 and have a heart, you can not read this novel without tears, laughter, anger and awe. this novel is better than approximately 95% of novels currently on this planet. i'd like to travel back in time and cup steinbeck's face in my hands and say, "you did it, john. you did it." ...more flag 239 likes · like · see review view all 47 comments julie g how kind, nicole. thank you!

may 08, 2022 05:00pm · flag pam great review.

lonesome dove is so much more fun though!

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the grapes of wrath begins with the description of the severe drought and dust storms that deprived farmers of their livelihood and sustenance...

the dawn came, but no day. in the gray sky a red sun appeared, a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back toward darkness, and the win "and the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain..." *revelation 16:10*

the grapes of wrath begins with the description of the severe drought and dust storms that deprived farmers of their livelihood and sustenance...

the dawn came, but no day. in the gray sky a red sun appeared, a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back toward darkness, and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn.

no land, no home, no money, no food – time to hit the road and find a better place... but is there a better place? the bitterness we sold to the junk man – he got it all right, but we have it still. and when the owner men told us to go, that's us; and when the tractor hit the house, that's us until we're dead. to california or any place – every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. and some day – the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. and they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it.

but freedom of the poor is restricted by the freedom of the state and freedom of politicians and freedom of the rich...

"here's me that used to give all my fight against the devil 'cause i figgered the devil was the enemy. but they's somepin worse'n the devil got hold a the country, an' it ain't gonna let go till it's chopped loose. ever see one a them gila monsters take hold, mister?" that's the way of the state.

"lead 'em around and around. sling 'em in the irrigation ditch. tell 'em they'll burn in hell if they don't think like you. what the hell you want to lead 'em someplace for? jus' lead 'em."

that's the way of politicians.

"i hear 'em an' feel 'em; an' they're beating their wings like a bird in a attic. gonna bust their wings on a dusty winda tryin' ta get out."

and that's the fate of the poor.

"i'm learnin' one thing good," she said. "learnin' it all a time, ever' day. if you're in trouble or hurt or need – go to poor people. they're the only ones that'll help – the only ones."

the power always is on the side of the rich and if you're poor they won't give you anything, you'll have only what you can take. ...more flag 239 likes · like · see review view all 12 comments dec 26, 2014 henry avila rated it really liked it · review of another edition during the bleakness of the dry, dust bowl days as the suffocating particles fall everywhere ...you can&apost breathe... in your nose, eyes, clothes, food, house, the darkness at noon unable to see the sun during a dust storm, the top soil flying away carried by the winds never to return in the depression, when people ...

farmers lost their homes and land to the banks incapable to repay their loans , (no crops no money) symbolized by the joad family of oklahoma in the 1930&aposts . seeing black and white during the bleakness of the dry, dust bowl days as the suffocating particles fall everywhere ...you can't breathe... in your nose, eyes, clothes, food, house, the darkness at noon unable to see the sun during a dust storm, the top soil flying away carried by the winds never to return in the depression, when people ... farmers lost their homes and land to the banks incapable to repay their loans , (no crops no money) symbolized by the joad family of oklahoma in the 1930's . seeing black and white pictures tell only a small portion of this, the real story that john steinbeck wrote about masterfully in his novel the grapes of wrath. where a hungry large group of people, travel to the promise land of california a distant 1,500 miles away but find more starvation, abuse and death. in an old dilapidated automobile the joad's , ma the de facto leader and pa, tom, just released from prison for killing a man in self defense (it didn't help that both were drunk) . rose a teenager married to a lazy, shiftless dreamer connie and pregnant, uncle john who likes the bottle and his late wife he mourns too much for, their ancient parents and four other children. and last but not least the preacher reverend jim casy who doesn't want to preach any more, having lost his faith the thirteenth member (some will not get to their goal) . he's now after walking around searching for a purpose, in fact living like a bum decides since the people have left for the golden state , why not him too ? oklahoma, texas, new mexico, arizona and at long last crossing the colorado river into the paradise of california, with high mountains and hot steaming deserts, discovering more desert wastelands and still hundreds of miles to the fertile, prosperous , pretty, fabulously wealthy valley of san joaquin the richest one on the planet. but not for the 300,000 okies , (a misnomer, since many are not from oklahoma) an unknown name to the newcomers as they're scornfully called here, unfriendly natives and police hate , greatly distrust these poor needy miserable and frightened of them, most assuredly. the affluent farmers keep cutting the wages 30 cents an hour, 25, 20 and dropping how can the workers survive? tom is angry , tired of the endless struggle going from place to place in search of work, lack of food, housing, especially the treatment by the well off... like he is scum . nevertheless believes that nobody is above him and will fight back if necessary. deadly strikes, deputies burning down the laborers camps, violence and starving the old and the young, the vulnerable will not endure. a strong statement about man's inhumanity to his fellow being ...a little kindness sought but will it be found ? ...more flag 201 likes · like · see review view all 33 comments jun 25, 2014 lisa rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: 1001-books-to-read-before-you-die, so-good-it-hurts, nobels, unforgettable, favorites man-made environmental catastrophe and its (in)human cost - a study in inequality and injustice!

imagine having to leave your country because it is a wasteland created by a decade of dust storms? imagine having nowhere to go, but still crossing the desert in hope of finding a future after your past was wiped out by human failure, greed and environmental carelessness? imagine not being welcome when you arrive, with nothing but what your family vehicle can carry ...

"how can we live without our l man-made environmental catastrophe and its (in)human cost - a study in inequality and injustice!

imagine having to leave your country because it is a wasteland created by a decade of dust storms? imagine having nowhere to go, but still crossing the desert in hope of finding a future after your past was wiped out by human failure, greed and environmental carelessness? imagine not being welcome when you arrive, with nothing but what your family vehicle can carry ...

"how can we live without our lives? how will we know it's us without our past?"

imagine nobody caring about those thousands of "us" who lost their identities with their farms and livelihoods. immigrants are always also emigrants, and they carry the memory of being somebody, somewhere, in a distant past. to treat them as if they existed in a historical vacuum is as cruel as it is common, and it is the recurring topic of steinbeck's heartbreaking writing.

steinbeck is one of those authors that i love unconditionally. i once and more with each reading experience. i more travelled from where i lived in texas to visit steinbeck country in california - looking for his traces in monterey and salinas, always accompanied by his complete works, from hilarious short novels to the heavy epic novels of good and evil. in the end, i discovered his characters in the faces i saw on the road, i smelled his descriptions of nature in the humid or dry, dusty air, i heard his dialogues in the everyday exchanges on markets and in hot small town streets.

i love them all, each one in my carefully kept steinbeck collection. asked by one of my children the other day which steinbeck had influenced me most, i thought i was going to give an evasive, diplomatic answer, not making a statement for or against any specific story. instead i heard myself say:

"the grapes of wrath!"

and the moment i said it i knew that i meant it. it may not exactly be my favourite steinbeck, but definitely the one i feel uncomfortably, chillingly getting under my skin immediately. just recalling the voices of the characters makes me shiver - as they suffer through the ordeal of fleeing from the dust bowl, that environmental catastrophe caused by greed and paid for by individual families, to a californian paradise which doesn't welcome newcomers. the poverty, the suffering, the love and despair - it is tangible in each sentence, in each story line!

family saga, social study, historical document, political standpoint, ethical statement on compassion and greed - it is all there, but invisible under the masterfully crafted story, which has its own quality, beyond the message on the essential needs and worries of poor, common people without protective networks.

i don't know how to close this review, as i am not done with this novel at all, despite having read it several times. but one quote shall stand as a warning to those who believe their wealth protects them against being humans, and feeling poor for behaving poorly:

"if he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an' maybe he's disappointed that nothin' he can do 'll make him feel rich." ...more flag 182 likes · like · see review view all 30 comments jun 14, 2017 helene jeppesen rated it it was amazing · review of another edition this book was incredibly scary; especially because it was so realistic. john steinbeck has a way of depicting society and people in a raw and honest way that leaves you with a hollow feeling inside, and yet you devour his books because they are so amazing.

in "the grapes of wrath" we meet tom, who has just been released from prison on probation, as well as his family who&aposts about to move to the west because banks and tractors have evicted them from their own home and land. it&aposts usa in the middle this book was incredibly scary; especially because it was so realistic. john steinbeck has a way of depicting society and people in a raw and honest way that leaves you with a hollow feeling inside, and yet you devour his books because they are so amazing.

in "the grapes of wrath" we meet tom, who has just been released from prison on probation, as well as his family who's about to move to the west because banks and tractors have evicted them from their own home and land. it's usa in the middle of the great depression and times are changing. everyone is moving from east to west in order to find work and survive these new and abhorrent circumstances.

in many ways, the writing of this book is very straightforward, but at the same time it digs deeper when you read between the lines and look behind the characters' behaviour and dialogue. i was especially fond of how steinbeck, at every other chapter, stops up to depict the conditions in america at that point in time; whether it be about a car seller and his greediness, the devastating conditions for the workers in the fruit fields or a turtle. i was a big fan, and especially the ending left me speechless. until now, "east of eden" has been my favourite of steinbeck's, but "the grapes of wrath" is a close runner-up. ...more flag 179 likes · like · see review view all 6 comments feb 06, 2011 jason rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: for-kindle, 2012, reviewed *in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage*.

this book really gets my goat. those poor, dirty joads. so poor and so, so dirty. after being displaced from their oklahoma farm following the dust bowl storms that wreck their crops and cause them to default on their loans, the joads find themselves a family of migrants in search of work and food. they join a stream of hundreds of thousands of other migrant families across the united stat *in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage*.

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the reason this gets my goat is 'cause it doesn't have to be that way. yes, the joads are uneducated and wouldn't qualify for anything more than basic manual labor. yes, it is the great depression and this is not an easy time to find a job even for skilled workers. and yes, they are a family of 47 and they probably look pretty ridiculous all crammed up in the back of their makeshift pickup truck. but gosh darn it, if only they had unions! if only they had fair labor standards to guarantee them a minimum wage! if only they had the protection of government legislation to prohibit wealthy landowners from colluding to keep prices high and wages low!

which leads me to wonder... what would ayn rand think of all this? after all, aren't labor unions and economic regulation precisely what she argues against? by that account, if *atlas shrugged* is the supposed bible of right-wing thinkers, then i'd have to say that *the grapes of wrath* might just be its antithesis. but the real difference, as far as i can tell, is that while *atlas shrugged* represents a crazy woman's vision of a whack job world that could never actually exist, john steinbeck tells it like it is, and how it *was*, for so many hard working americans who were taken advantage of under a system that did nothing to protect them. and what's even more remarkable is that steinbeck's characters (whom, by the way, rand would refer to as "moochers"—just thought we should be clear on that) make dagny taggart and henry reardon look like a

couple of pussies. what is it ma joad says? that if you're in trouble or hurt or need, to "go to poor people—for they're the only ones that'll help."

this is a novel about the working poor, and it should serve to remind us what can go horribly wrong in an unregulated economy. ...more flag 162 likes · like · see review view all 38 comments feb 02, 2008 jennifer rated it it was amazing · review of another edition *review contains a partial spoiler*

if you read enough reviews, you'll notice that most of the people who gave this book 1 or 2 stars had to read the book for a high school class. most of the 4 and 5 star ratings came from those who read it as adults. i recommend listening to those who read it as adults.

many people hate the ending, but i thought it was great. creepy? yes, but there was an immense amount of beauty and generosity in that creepy little ending. at one point in the story, ma tol' ros *review contains a partial spoiler*

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many people hate the ending, but i thought it was great. creepy? yes, but there was an immense amount of beauty and generosity in that creepy little ending. at one point in the story, ma tol' rosasharn that it ain't all about her (most high school kids think everything is all about them, which is probably one reason they couldn't enjoy this book or most other classics they are forced to read). realizing this at the very end made rosasharn crack her first smile in ages (at least that's my take on the mysterious smile). i wasn't disappointed in the lack of closure at the end, because the closure came in the middle when ma said, "rich fellas come up an' they die, an' their kids ain't no good an' they die out. but we keep a'comin'. we're the people that live. they can't wipe us out; they can't lick us. we'll go on forever, pa, 'cause we're the people." so you know they will be fine whether life continues to be a struggle or not. they will be better off than the rich man with the million acres they talked about - "if he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an' maybe he's disappointed that nothin' he can do'll make him feel rich." another good quote is "i'm learnin' one thing good...if you're in trouble or hurt or need - go to the poor people. they're the only ones that'll help - the only ones." i saw a special on 20/20 around christmas time about how the lower class are more generous overall than the middle and upper class, so this still applies today. would anyone like my savings account? i think i'm going to give poverty a shot :) ...more flag 157 likes · like · see review view all 17 comments jul 17, 2019 matt rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: great-depression, classic-novels **"i'll be all around in the dark. i'll be everywhere. wherever you can look – wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, i'll be there. wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, i'll be there. i'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. i'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the house they build, i'll be there too..."**

- tom joad in john steinbeck's *the grapes of wrath*

"and the angel th "i'll be all around in the dark. i'll be everywhere. wherever you can look – wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, i'll be there. wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, i'll be there. i'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. i'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the house they build, i'll be there too..."

- tom joad in john steinbeck's *the grapes of wrath*

"and the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of god..."

- the book of revelations 14:19 (king james version)

for as long as i can recall, i have loved reading. but that love has been tested before. i am speaking, of course, about *school*, and in particular, about a succession of uninspired english teachers foisting uninspired syllabi upon their disinterested students. it only takes one fourth-rate translation of *crime and punishment* to make you foreswear the written word in favor of the videogame console.

maybe it was the very fact that i was being *forced* to read that did it. whatever the reason, i spent most of high school and college absorbing very little of value from my literature courses.

john steinbeck's *the grapes of wrath* was the exception. you can keep to *kill a mockingbird* and (especially) *catcher in the rye*. it was steinbeck's sturdy portrayal of the itinerant joad family, leaving the dustbowl of oklahoma for the green fields of california, that captured my imagination.

my reasons for enjoying *the grapes of wrath* are probably the same reasons that this perennially-assigned book has so many critical detractors. i loved the simplicity of the language, which eschewed formal daring (i.e., pretentiousness) in favor of a lyrical plainness that brought to mind robert penn warren. i also appreciated the blunt-force of the message. there is very little subtlety here. instead, it is a parable, filled with obvious symbolism and rife with meanings. steinbeck does not try to hide his message; he is not endeavoring to get you to spend the rest of your days attempting to translate the runes.

this summer, i decided to test my recollection with a reread, while also consuming another bona fide classic. coming on the heels of *les misérables*, the 528-page okie epic felt practically brisk.

a summary of *the grapes of wrath* is incredibly straightforward (which was probably another reason i appreciated this as a student). it opens with tom joad on his way home from prison, where he has served four years for manslaughter. the home he finds, however, is changing fast. dry weather is destroying the crops, and corporate-owned tractors are driving off the tenant farmers. soon enough, tom and the joad family (pa and ma; granpa and granma; uncle john; brothers al, noah, and winfield; and sisters rose of sharon and ruthie), along with former preacher jim casy, hop in a beat-up old truck and hit route 66. in their journey to california, and their encounters once they arrive, we experience themes – the white working class; economic inequality; migration – that seem as relevant as ever.

perhaps the most striking thing about *the grapes of wrath* (which is otherwise proudly straight-down-the-middle), is its use of intercalary chapters. it is a structure that can possibly determine – on its own – your reaction to steinbeck's opus. the intercalary chapters are cutaway scenes that are inserted throughout the central narrative. they have nothing to do with the joad family whatsoever and consist of descriptions of the weather; vignettes between unrelated characters; and towards the end of the novel, a fierce denunciation of merciless profiteering:

the people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. and they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quick-lime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

as you might have guessed already, i am fine with these chapters. in fact, some of them i really liked. one clever chapter, for instance, is told in stream-of-conscious style from the perspective of a used car salesman as he gulls the hicks and rubes who wander onto his lot. of course, one can view this quite differently, as mere filler that needlessly swells an otherwise spare storyline. i will acknowledge that it is an arguable point. yet in adding these sections, steinbeck is able to create the larger context through which the joad family is moving, adding a mythic overlay to their journey, making it into a modernized version of westward pioneers in their covered wagons.

for me, the most impressive thing about steinbeck's writing is his uncanny and immersive powers of description. when he paints a scene, he fills out the canvas, all the way to the edges. you know what a thing looks like; how the heat feels; what sound the wind is making:

a gentle wind followed by rain clouds, driving them northward, a wind that softly clashed the drying corn. a day went by and the wind increased, steady, unbroken by gusts. the dust from the roads fluffed up, and fell out and fell on the weeds beside the fields, and fell into the fields a little way. now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. the wind grew stronger. the rain crust broke and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke. the corn threshed the wind and made a dry, rushing sound. the finest dust did not settle back to earth now, but disappeared into the darkening sky...

the characters are admittedly archetypes, which is a fancy way of saying they are built from the feet-up with clichés. still, steinbeck draws everyone, even side characters like uncle john, with great vividness. the lodestar of the group is ma, fierce and tough as a cob, willing to do anything to keep the family together, and imbued with a pragmatic wisdom:

"ain't you thinkin' what's it gonna be like when we get there?" [al asked]. "ain't you scared it won't be nice like we thought?"

"no," [ma] said quickly. "no, i ain't. you can't do that. i can't do that. it's too much – livin' too many lives. up ahead they's a thousan' lives we might live, but when it comes, it'll on'y be one..."

one of the ways you know an author has done a good job with a character is when you feel yourself hating him or her with great passion. in that regard, steinbeck also succeeds, as selfish al, senseless winfield, whining rose of sharon, and hopelessly ruthless all drove me nuts. now, you might say that's the bulk of the cast. that is correct. things are helped along, however, by a lot of witty dialogue, ribald humor (including a couple tom joad penis jokes), and genuinely tense confrontations.

(there is also the general implication that human beings, on occasion, engage in sexual relations, a fact that caused at least one contemporary critic to label this "pornography." it is not, dear reader, pornography).

the grapes of wrath has always been attended by controversy. some of it stems from the aforementioned earthiness. more of it comes from steinbeck's alleged politics. the charge, as is often the case if someone gives the free market the side-eye, is that steinbeck was espousing communism. certainly, he was a pro-labor leftist, and accordingly showed some sympathy with the cause. but steinbeck really tried to avoid being pigeonholed into one ideology. at the end of the day, he was interested in people, and the only theory that he delineates with any kind of coherence is the belief in the power of people working together.

to be sure, there is within these pages a critique of capitalism and the way it – in its purest form – can wring a person's life for a bigger margin of profit. this came from an honest place, as steinbeck covered migrant workers during the great depression as a journalist. he went to hooverilles and government camps. he collected the stories. his sympathies were with the worker and their mistreatment served as the wellspring of his anger. near the end of *the grapes of wrath*, when he finally unleashes a barrage of unrestrained corporate capitalism, it still feels raw, eighty years after it was published.

steinbeck believed a revolution was coming. ultimately, he was wrong about the shape history was taking. perhaps he misread the tea leaves. more likely, the sudden explosion of the second world war, which created millions of jobs, cut the revolution off at the knees.

(the irony is that the joad family, derided by californians as "reds," are innately conservative people who were intent on avoiding government handouts. after pearl harbor, they likely found decent defense industry jobs and got ma that white house she was always dreaming on. heck, the next generation probably voted for reagan. commies, indeed!)

unpacking the controversies and the politics and the symbolism and even the timelessness are beside the point. what makes *the grapes of wrath* a great novel is that it transports you into a fully-realized world, with fully-realized characters. when i finished the final page (even with its whacky ending), the story did not end. i continued to think about the characters, to imagine where they might go next. and even when i stopped actually thinking about them, i still remembered them.

it has been twenty years since i read this last, and upon reading it again, it struck me that i had never forgotten it in the first place. ...more flag 144 likes · like · see review view all 8 comments jan 27, 2022 margaret m (semi hiatus until october) rated it it was amazing shelves: best-historical-fiction **"...in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy."**

and so 5 stars for a sobering read that is 'the grapes of wrath', an epic story and a haunting journey of the joad family that epitomises the plight of many people during the 1930's great depression. route 66 became a path of people in flight as they headed west in search of a livelihood after the devastating effects of the dust and scorching summer had destroyed th **"...in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy."**

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a book that tells of hunger and destitution while the landowners and large companies reeked in huge profits while forcing people to work in atrocious conditions and for appalling wages. it tells of the brutality at the hands of law and order that was unleashed to keep a desperate work force subservient and in need. and it tells of the lack of morality as thousands of people were subjected to the most inhumane treatment, in living conditions tantamount to slavery.

"and the migrants streamed in on the highways and their hunger was in their eyes, and their need was in their eyes. they had no argument, no system, nothing but their numbers and their needs."

after an arduous journey across america, people continued to experience the worst of exhaustion, fatigue, and tiredness beyond what any sleep could cure as they toiled the lands and witnessed the large companies destroy crops, because to give it away free meant people would not be forced to buy this produce.

review and comments

john steinbeck writes a fascinating story of crime that goes beyond denunciation, and through his writing you can feel the sorrow and desperation etched on the faces and in the souls of men, women and children, and in the case of the joad family like many others would have been forced to bury their dead en route.

he tells of story of the have's and have not's', but not just in financial terms, the have not's are those devoid of any moral code and abused a people displaced and in need, starving without homes, and without shelter. the have's were the people rich in their values and you can feel this in the way steinbeck describes their sense of community, demonstrating the best of human nature, as he speaks of the "...*twenty families that became one family, the children were the children of all. the loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the west was one dream*"

a powerful literacy feast for the eyes, a tale of hardship that touches your heart, and a master class in writing that has stood the test of time. epic, reflective, haunting, absorbing and yet beautiful. ...more flag 138 likes · like · see review view all 80 comments sep 17, 2021 leonard gaya rated it really liked it · review of another edition blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, storms, locusts, darkness, and death. these were the plagues the lord clamped onto egypt (*exodus*, 7-10). and these plagues triggered the migration of the people of israel into the wilderness. after spending forty years in the desert, they finally reached the "land of milk and honey". more plights and perils were awaiting them there.

some three thousand years later, on another continent across the ocean, a people of farmers went through a similar ordeal blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, storms, locusts, darkness, and death. these were the plagues the lord clamped onto egypt (*exodus*, 7-10). and these plagues triggered the migration of the people of israel into the wilderness. after spending forty years in the desert, they finally reached the "land of milk and honey". more plights and perils were awaiting them there.

some three thousand years later, on another continent across the ocean, a people of farmers went through a similar ordeal once again. and this is how john steinbeck elevated the story of the impoverished sharecroppers from the dust bowl region during the great depression to the level of an epic voyage, comparable to the *exodus* or the *odyssey*. like the israelites of yore, these oklahomans were forced, by drought and economic hardship, to leave their land and travel down the road 66 to a new "promised land", a new canaan named california.

the grapes of wrath is a re-interpretation of the bible in yet another way. a few characters are, indeed, sometimes very explicitly, christlike figures. compare easy's "you don't know what you're a-doin'." (penguin modern classics paperback, p. 386) with *luke* 23,34. compare tom's "i'll be there" (p. 419) with *matthew* 18,20. even the title is a quote from the *apocalypse of john* 14,19. and the whole novel is the story of a people looking for redemption and a new land, which they may or may not find on this earth...

further still, one could argue that steinbeck is also retelling some of the canonical works of 19th-century literature. in a sense, *the grapes of wrath* is the american version of les misérables: tom joad is the jean valjean of the new world, and the corporate farmers of 1930s california are just as awful as the police and army of 1830s paris. in brief, steinbeck's novel is the paragon of the "great american novel"; a multi-layered narrative that lends itself, like the bible, to a typological reading on different levels.

at any rate, despite its epic or mythical dimension, steinbeck's writing is anything but lofty. on the contrary, it conveys people's mindset and daily struggles, their constant concern for simple material things: the state of disrepair of their car and how they manage to fix a flat tire, the need to put bread on the table and the recipe they use to make fried dough, the toilet flush and lack of loo roll. the narrator describes these things with meticulous precision – a technique typical of survival literature, from defoe's robinson crusoe to mccarthy's the road. more could be said about the characterisation and the deft and consistent use of dialect and turns of phrases of the people of oklahoma – this also harks back to mark twain and william faulkner's novels.

the grapes of wrath is also, among many other things, a compelling political manifesto. the novel's structure oscillates between classic narrative chapters (the joads' story) and discursive, slightly outraged lectures whereby steinbeck examines the causes and effects of the southern migration (from a marxist point of view). namely, the rising mechanisation and automation of agricultural labour and the constant push for higher corporate profits and lower individual wages.

in short, the terrifying "pillars of fire" of ancient israel are now replaced by the dehumanising "invisible hand" of modern capitalism: a vast network of socio-economic forces that engirdles the whole of western civilisation. in the end, forced migrations, people trying to flee wars, persecution, deprivation and starvation, unsanitary refugee camps, combined exploitation and hatred of incoming migrants, viewed as subhuman in their new "land of milk and honey" – all this is as real as ever today, in many parts of the world. all of which makes steinbeck's novel as essential as ever.

the 1940 film adaptation is, for the most part, faithful to steinbeck's plot and dramatic tone, except for the final section – notably, the bleak and slightly disturbing motif of the *caritas romana* at the end of the novel is absent from the film. nonetheless, it is one of john ford's finest movies. steinbeck's novel also influenced many other works of fiction, from stephen king's the stand to christopher nolan's interstellar. ...more flag 165 likes · like · see review view all 17 comments feb 11, 2022 debbie rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: classics, great-depression, 2022-reads, contemporary-fiction, own, american-west-coast **why i chose to read this book:**

1. this book has always intrigued me ever since i was a kid, seeing it on my parents' bookshelf, so i added it to my wtr list about two years ago;
2. i pushed it up that list after reading the four winds by kristin hannah a few months ago (i highly recommend her novel for the atmospheric descriptions of the unrelenting dust storms); and,
3. february is "classics month" for me!

note: this book may appeal to readers who have some background knowledge of the great depress why i chose to read this book:

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note: this book may appeal to readers who have some background knowledge of the great depression, specifically of the dust bowl and migration of american farmers to california.

positives:

1. the character-development in this novel is its strong suit! as i traveled along with the joad family, migrant farmers (okies) from the dust bowl to the land of milk and honey, i cheered for ma joad and her no-nonsense attitude and shook my head in frustration over son, al's one-track mind. i was awestruck by the times they gladly helped out others, even though they had very little of their own to share. likeable or not, if you were living in close quarters with another family for several months, their personalities would grate on your nerves as well;
2. such descriptive realism! i could vividly picture every scene and appreciated the authentic dialogue; and,
3. if you prefer <300-page books, then don't read this novel! the first 200 pages focuses on the actual journey from oklahoma to california, whereas the final 200 pages depicts this family's life in california. although the plot is slow-going, i savored all the successes and issues they encountered along the way.

niggles:

1. although steinbeck gives a detailed account of a typical migrant's journey to california and the hardships awaiting them there, i wish he wrote a more descriptive setting re: the dust storms these midwestern families faced; and,
2. what was steinbeck thinking with that ending? i know that several readers really liked that part, but i have issues when a strong realistic story strays into massive symbolism in the last paragraph! i don't think steinbeck understands women that well if he thinks *any* woman would do what rose of sharon did! eww! ? to me, her actions just didn't make sense!

overall, i had empathy for the hopes and dreams the joads had along their journey and understood that when those hopes were dashed, it only led to despair and anger (wrath). unfortunately, this story has been, and continues to be, relevant today. ...more flag 139 likes · like · see review view all 74 comments feb 18, 2013 maciek rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: pulitzer-prize-for-fiction, reviewed, historical-fiction, own-in-paperback, national-book-award-**how can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children?**

the grapes of wrath won john steinbeck both the national book award and the pulitzer prize, firmly engraving his name on the stone tablet featuring the canon of great american writers. published in 1939, it is arguably steinbeck's best known work and is still widely read today. admirers praised steinbeck for writing an epic tale of biblical proportions, singing songs of **how can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children?**

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criticism didn't stop at negative reviews. the book was banned across the country and sometimes publicly burned by enraged citizens; steinbeck received hate mail and death threats. the book made him a lot of powerful enemies. *the associated farmers have begun an hysterical personal attack on me both in the papers and a whispering campaign*, he said, *i'm a jew, a pervert, a drunk, a dope fiend*. a whispering smear campaign against steinbeck was set in motion by his new enemies, aiming to defame him and turn him from a celebrated author into a figure of hatred: they accused him of being a jew, who wanted to deliberately undermine the economy and acted in zionist-communist interest. *the associated farmers are really working up a campaign*, he wrote to his agent, *i have made powerful enemies with the grapes. they will not kill me, i think, but they will destroy me if and when they can*. he was right.

when lewis milestone, author of the screenplay for *mice and men* came to central california to explore possible locations for the movie, steinbeck never stopped at any ranches in fear that they might get physically assaulted by their residents. the undersheriff of santa clara county was a friend of steinbeck, and warned him to never stay in a hotel room alone: *the boys got a rape case set for you. you get alone in a hotel and a dame will come in, tear off her clothes, scratch her face and scream and you try to talk yourself out of that one. they won't touch your book but there's easier ways*. steinbeck found himself under enormous stress and strain as he realized that associated farmers controlled the sheriff's office in california, and were "capable of anything"; he was also investigated by the fbi under president hoover, which saw him as a dangerous subversive. he had to adopt an alias while visiting los angeles and keep secret files. he was aware that most of the people who hated him have themselves been victims of propaganda used precisely by those who accused him of being a propagandist; he told his agent that *the articles written against me are all by people who admit they haven't read grapes, indeed wouldn't dirty their minds with it*.

john steinbeck in 1939, when the book was published.

still, at the same time, many other readers found *the grapes of wrath* to be enthralling and necessary - a book which attracted attention to the plight of poor migrant farm workers to the west, showed the brutality and harshness of their condition and challenged the nation to do better for those people. earle birney called the book *a deed - the act of a man out of the pity and wrath of his heart*, and it was read and loved as such. it captured the turbulent period of american history and provoked a reaction. it made an impact, a real and lasting one - which is its greatest achievement.

interestingly enough, within months of its publication journalist carey mcwilliams published his own work on treatment of migrant workers in california. *factories in the field: the story of migratory farm labor in california* was a landmark study which exposed the social and environmental damage inflicted by the growth of corporate agriculture in california, and a condemnation of both the politics and consequences of large-scale agribusiness. mcwilliams documented the social and economic trends which led to establishment of huge land holdings in california and the constant need for cheap migrant labor; he found that the "okies" were only the latest group to be exploited by the invisible owners of california's first industry. the previous groups included native americans and immigrants from china, japan, mexico, india, armenia and the philippines. shortly before the publication of *factories in the field*, mcwilliams became the head of california's division of immigration and housing where he focused on improving wages for agricultural workers and their living conditions; he increased inspections of labor camps owned by the growers, as he felt that on-farm housing made the workers more dependent on their employers, and changed the formula which was used to deny relief to workers who refused to accept farm work at prevailing piece wages, effectively forcing some of the growers to increase their piece rates. understandably, mcwilliams and his work were also not well received by california growers; they called him an *agricultural pest number one, worse than pear blight or boll weevils*, and accused of conspiring together with steinbeck to ruin their reputation. funnily enough the two never met, and did not arrange the release dates of their work in any way.

(mcwilliams was also involved in the committee led by senator robert la follette jr., which became known as *la follette civil liberties committee* and which has performed the most extensive investigation in american history into employer violations of the rights or workers to organize and bargain collectively. between 1936 and 1941, the committee conducted extensive hearings and collected a vast number of testimonies. these hearings exposed

the tactics used by america's leading corporations to prevent their workers from forming unions: employment of extensive industrial espionage and strikebreaking services, stockpiling munitions such as submachine guns, rifles and tear gas, and even subverting local law by hiring their own police forces. the committee closed its hearings in late 1939 and early 1940, when it traveled up and down the california coast and collected testimonies of more than four hundred labor organizers, growers and farm workers. mcwilliams ghostwrote the committee's report, a stern indictment of california's agricultural factory system, but it was not presented to congress until october 1942, without much impact: *no one was listening and no one cared, for we were at war.*

mcwilliams felt that the war enabled both growers and state officials from implementing a reform which they would almost certainly would have been forced to implement otherwise, and that the whole country went to sleep until a young black girl named rosa parks refused to go to the back of the bus in montgomery, alabama in 1955. he, however, did not stay silent and stop working. on the contrary, failure to implement recommended reforms seemed to give him *more* strength to combat injustice: he published *prejudice: japanese americans, symbol of racial intolerance*, a sharp critique and a chronicle of internment of japanese-americans during the war, and was active in opposing mccarthyism. in 1960 carey mcwilliams became the first american reporter to reveal that the cia was training a group of cuban exiles in guatemala to serve as guerrillas in the bay of pigs invasion. his article appeared in october, five months before the invasion happened. he died in 1980.)

carey mcwilliams, a good man.

the copy of *the grapes of wrath* that i read had a great introduction by robert demott, who provided plenty of excerpts from steinbeck's journal and revealed his ambitions and doubts as he was composing the book. steinbeck was convinced that if he could "do the book properly", it would be a truly american book and "one of the really fine books". at the same time, he was constantly thinking about what he perceived to be his own lack of ability and limitations as a writer, which greatly troubled him. honesty was what he saw as the answer and the way to write the book - if he could keep the honesty in, everything would be fine.

steinbeck had plenty of opportunity to do exactly that. while his initial writings have not been successful, he struck a chord with 1935's *tortilla flat* which tells the story of danny and his friends, a group of paisanos who live in post-war monterey. but real success came with a series of california novels, stories of common people trying to make it during the great depression - *in dubious battle, of mice and men* and the most important one, *the grapes of wrath*.

the severe drought of the early 1930's resulted in a massive agricultural failure in the southern region of the great plains, above all in western oklahoma and the texas panhandle, where the fields have been heavily overcultivated by wheat farmers after the first world war. the area consisted of millions of acres of exposed topsoil, no longer anchored by growing roots as the crops withered and died from lack of rainfall. constant sunshine dried the soil and turned it into dust, which then blew away in amounts sufficient to black out the sky and reduce visibility to a few feet; these immense dust storms centered on the panhandles of oklahoma and texas, and the adjacent areas of kansas, colorado and new mexico. by the mid 1930's countless families have been deprived of means to earn their livelihood, pay their mortgages and buy equipment necessary to stay competitive with growing industrialization. dust bowl victims were forced to leave their lands, and without any real prospects of employment move to california - the promised land.

a dust storm hitting boise city, right in the panhandle of oklahoma on april 14th, 1935. this storm was particularly severe, and was one of the worst dust storms in american history, causing immense economic and agricultural damage - it is estimated to have displaced 300 million tons of topsoil in the great plains. it became known as the black sunday. (right click - open in a new tab for a bigger photo)

in 1936 steinbeck was hired by the *san francisco news*, which commissioned him to write a series of articles on the dust bowl migration. to write the seven articles, published as *the harvest gypsies*, steinbeck traveled to california and visited local labor camps, shantytowns and hoovervilles - migrant settlements named so after president herbert hoover, who was widely blamed for the depression. there he met tom collins, manager of the weedpatch camp who became a major source of information and a travelling companion. collins collected statistics on camp life which steinbeck used as primary material for his articles, and both traveled together on three trips through california. they visited the settlements, went to meetings, stayed on camps and ranches, worked in the fields. after the publication steinbeck and his wife drove west along route 66, from oklahoma to california, like countless migrants before them.

these experiences provided steinbeck with more than enough material to depict the lives of poor farmers forced to migrate west. he set out to write a novel, conscious of the importance of what he saw and experienced. *i am not writing a satisfying story*, he told his editor, pascal covici. *i've done my damndest to rip a reader's nerves to rags, i don't want him satisfied...i tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written.*

all through the process, steinbeck remained aware of the fact that he was creating a literary work. demott describes *the grapes of wrath as an engaged novel with a partisan posture, many complex voices, and passionate prose styles.* steinbeck saw the composition process of the novel similar to the composition of a symphony - he wanted his chapters, voices and styles speak to each other, resonate with recurring themes, the total impression far more powerful than its individual parts.

steinbeck wrote of events and people he himself experienced and knew, and his concern was humanitarian: to do justice to the migrant men and women, their desire to work and their efforts to retain their dignity and settle in the promised land, be an advocate for the common working people whose abuse by their corporate employers was largely a silent tragedy. men willing to work were hungry and starved in the land of plenty, which for steinbeck (and any moral human being) was unacceptable; he sided with david rather than goliath, and set out to write an epic which would surpass all of his other work. *this must be a good book*, he wrote in his journal, *it simply must. i haven't any choice. it must be far and away the best thing i have ever attempted - slow but sure, piling detail on detail until a picture and an experience emerge. until the whole throbbing thing emerges.*

steinbeck was aware of his ambition and consciously employed imagery from and parallels to the single best read epic text in the us - the bible. the exodus of the joad family to california was written with the attention and momentum of the biblical exodus of the israelites, led by mooses out of egypt. california is the promised land, *a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey* (exodus 3:7-9). the okies arriving at the border of california are stopped by the border patrol guards, who refuse to let them enter (except for when the labor is needed) - much like the israelites faced persecution and cruelty from the amonites, moabites and edomites when they were trying to enter caanan. tom joad can be seen as mooses - he killed a man who spoke bad about jim casy, like mooses killed an egyptian who was beating a hebrew slave, and both served as leader figures for their people. jim casy is a christ figure, leader to the same initials - a preacher who questioned the established religion and fought the temptations of flesh, and lead the twelve joads like christ lead his twelve disciples. like jesus, he disappeared and wandered alone; he taught the gospel of social and spiritual unity: love for all men, sympathy for the poor and oppressed. (view spoiler)[casy believed in his mission to save the suffering workers so much that he was willing to give his life for it, and his death is exactly like that of christ - he dies a martyr, killed because of his beliefs, murdered by an agent of power with a piece of wood. (hide spoiler)].

the joads depend on their car like noah depended on his ark, and like noah gathered all the necessary species to preserve life on earth they gathered all their important things to ensure their own survival. the old testament practically jumps off the page - there's even a literal flood in this story.

it is also interesting to see from the perspective of a contemporary reader how the novel reads like a perfect example of a dystopian novel: large banks took hold over the land of the joads and evicted them from it, forcing them to leave their native land of oklahoma where society has collapsed and migrate towards a new, better world. the theme of large corporations and financial institutions effectively assuming control over lives of individual people is a classic dystopian theme, and so is the journey of a group of those who survived the collapse of society - classic example being *the stand*, more recent being the pulizer winning *the road*. steinbeck's landscape is bleak and hostile, his protagonists experience real life-threatening risks and deprivations which forces them to cross many boundaries.

the grapes of wrath became the most successful social protest novel of the 20th century, and its message remains fresh and accurate even today, especially today. we live in a period characterized by growing income inequality and the widening gap between the richest and the poorest, where certain institutions of the financial sector have been deemed "too big to fail" effectively making them more dangerous than ever. corporations lobby the politicians to ensure that their own interests are met, and enjoy a wide range of big government subsidies and tax breaks, sponsored by ordinary citizens. while the big corporations enjoy all the benefits guaranteed by a big, nanny state ordinary citizens are being told that they don't deserve it and that they have to help themselves and pull themselves up by their own bootstraps; politicians and pundits use the words "welfare" in pejorative context when it comes to their own viewers and constituents, as if it was something shameful instead of an extended hand, which helps the ordinary working people stay afloat. a welfare state is inconsiderable if it could actually benefit those who need it most - the poor and struggling ordinary citizens, who are left to walk on their own and slowly cross to the other side. in this vision of society all that i regard as a vice is turned into a virtue: greed, selfishness and no care for the weaker, a world where people push forward with sharp elbows and know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

american economist robert reich recently made a succinct post on his facebook page, which i quote here in its entirety (emphasis mine). play us out, mr. reich.

"one of the legacies of the reagan-thatcher era -- which is very much still with us -- was to denigrate the very idea of the "public good." anything preceded by the adjective "public" -- public schools, public transportation, public parks, public libraries, public welfare -- was (and is) suspect. the private sector, it was assumed, could do it better; competition and the profit motive would generate savings and efficiencies; citizens would be better served if they were treated as "customers" and "clients." well, we now have three decades to assess the results. what happened? "privatization" has meant more profits for the private sector, better services for those wealthy enough to pay more for them, and poorer services and higher taxes for almost everyone else. the rich have seceded into their own private schools, private jets, private health clubs, and privatized communities; most americans must now pay individually for what previous generations paid for collectively, through their taxes. certain public goods, like higher education, have morphed into private investments. **but the biggest loss, i think, has been our sense of the common good itself: out understanding that we are all in it together, that we are bound together by an implicit social contract involving obligations to one another that define a decent society, and that much of what we have and enjoy in life depends on what we achieve in common with others.**" ...more flag 117 likes · like · see review view all 73 comments may 11, 2016 carol rated it it was amazing shelves: historical-fiction, favorites, classics, chunkster, read-2016

omgosh! powerful and tragic.....with an ending never to be forgotten!

in **the grapes of wrath**, hard times plague the joad family from beginning to end, and chronicle the great depression of the 1930's; no rain, dust storms and the dreaded "monster" bank ended a much-loved and long-lived way of life forcing farmers to become migrant workers traveling from one unwelcome place to another; and no work + no money = no food, but the joad's **never** give up despite being tired, beaten down, angry and sad.

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"jus' try to live the day, jus' the day."

while not a particularly fast read, steinbeck (*my #1 favorite author*) creates realistic characters and devotes several (*short*) interim chapters (*including chapter 1*) to developing an atmospheric description of the time, **and.....**

while **east of eden** continues to be one of my all-time favorite reads, i definitely felt **the grapes of wrath** deserving of a 5 star rating as well. **"it is a work conceived on a completely different plane."**

...more flag 115 likes · like · see review view all 42 comments oct 11, 2015 elyse walters rated it it was amazing i'm listening to the audiobook. it's sooooo good!!!!

i've read the book. i've seen the stage production, but i never listen to the audiobook.... and the narrator's are so so terrific!!!! flag 128 likes · like · see review view all 27 comments dec 27, 2014 madeline rated it really liked it shelves: the-list chirst. this was a tough one to read.

i don't just mean it was depressing. it was, obviously - a book about a poor family being forced from their home during the great depression and having to beg for the chance to pick cotton at fifteen cents per hour can't be anything except depressing - but it was the most depressing book i've ever read. that honor probably goes to *the hunchback of notre dame*, although i guess *angela's ashes* is a close second.

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this was hard to read, not because it was a portrayal of a horrible period of history that actually happened. that contributed to the tragedy of the book, of course, coupled with the knowledge that there were not just a few joad families during the great depression, but millions of them, so your percentage of possible happy endings is going to be pretty low.

it wasn't even sad because steinbeck was using the backdrop of the great depression to illustrate the greater problems in america - the disparity between rich and poor, the way low-level laborers have to fight tooth and nail to achieve the most basic human rights, the fact that the people who run the major banks and farms are horrible unfeeling shells of human beings, etc.

the grapes of wrath is sad for all of these reasons, but here is what makes it sadder than anything: not the fact that steinbeck is writing about a horrible period in history that's behind us now. it's because that horrible period went away, and then it came back. we aren't in the middle of a second dust bowl, but make no mistake: we are living in the second great depression.

if you haven't read yet and have always been meaning to, there's no better time than now. steinbeck's book was written in the late 1930's, but just about everything that happens here is happening right in your state - possibly in your neighborhood - as you read this. you read about the banks in the great depression sending men to bulldoze people's houses while the family stood outside, and find yourself thinking, "well, at least now they just pile all your stuff on the curb after you get foreclosed on." you read about migrant families accepting offers to work all day at pitiful wages, because fifteen cents an hour is still better than zero cents an hour and the kids have to eat, and you think about the immigrants who pick your food in exchange for shitty wages. you read about the joad family and the others being called "okies" and forced out of their camps by the cops, and think about politicians who scream about "illegals" taking away the good american jobs and deporting kids' parents.

is this review getting too politically-minded? good. that's how steinbeck would have wanted me to talk about his book, because let me assure you - *the grapes of wrath* is extremely fucking political. another reviewer called it the anti-*atlas shrugged*, which is pretty damn apt. it's all about unions and the rights of the worker and how poor people need government assistance because sometimes *life just sucks for no fucking reason*.

it's sad and it's searing, and beautifully written, and unrelentingly depressing. but it should be read.

(the only reason this gets four stars instead of five is because of the ending. look, i know that steinbeck didn't have to give the joads a happy ending, and i'm not saying he gave them a sad one either - he gave them a weird one instead. i was already pretty sick of hearing about rose of sharon and her magical pregnancy, so it was just the cherry on top of a shit subplot sundae that the ending (view spoiler)[had her breastfeeding an old man after her baby died. first: allow me to turn into a middle-schooler for a second and say ewwwwwwww second: i kind of get what steinbeck was trying to say with his ending, because it kind of tied into his idea that the only ones who help poor people are other poor people, and rose of sharon was literally feeding a dying man with her own body and oh my god personal sacrifice...but on the other hand, she was breastfeeding an adult man. and it was weird and gross and then the book was over. nope. (hide spoiler)] ...more flag 111 likes · like · see review view all 19 comments sep 12, 2021 kay rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: classics, historical-fiction, fiction 4.5? a classic by john steinbeck during the depression era. the story follows the joad family's journey from the hardship in oklahoma to california looking for a better opportunity.

i was very reluctant to give it a try after reading reviews that it's a slow story. to my surprise, i listened to the second half twice. it was that good and the ending was very moving. i must disclose this is a bbc audio production and it feels like listening to a classic story on the radio. this is a version with 3 4.5?

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steinbeck describes the hardships, readers, moods and developments very forcefully. steinbeck has a grandiose style of storytelling and has become one of the nobel prize winners for a reason. his book "the grapes of wrath" excited me from the start. i really liked this book, because it was written in a very lively language. john steinbeck manages to transfer feelings directly to the reader. nevertheless, it is very easy to underst i've read the book "the grapes of wrath" written by john steinbeck.

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warning: this is an extremely long and ranty review because i hated this book more than life itself. if you loved this book enough to be triggered by a negative review, don't read the review. i read this book years ago, but i'm not removing the review despite having no idea how i'd feel about the novel now. opinions are a thing. i can roast this book. why don't you write a positive review instead?

also, do think about the kind of person you are if you get majorly triggered (to the point of bullying, stalking, harassment, pending personal information, etc., all of which has happened over this one review!) when you read a negative review of a fictional novel.

also, grow up, 'cause adults don't do that kind of crap over a book. they just enjoy the book themselves and let other people hate it because it literally doesn't hurt you any.

forced by her mother, a young girl listened to an audiobook version of the grapes of wrath by john steinbeck. it was something like forty hours long and all 144,000 seconds were moments of extreme torture.

let's dig into this so-called classic and see what really ticks at the heart of school's biggest monster.

part 1: themes

there are some books that become "classics" for no reason whatsoever. the jungle by upton sinclair was one of those. however, at least every so-called "classic" i've read before has had a reason for existence or at least one or two logical points.

the jungle showed the world the terrible conditions of meat processing factories bringing about safer conditions, cleaner food, and less disease. despite its original intention, it developed a great purpose that was frankly quite impressive. i salute thee, you underappreciated story!

the grapes of wrath, though? as far as i can tell, it can only lead to negative consequences - blaming the government for everything that goes wrong in your life, insistence and later dependence upon welfare, and some very incorrect views of the world.

there are many things wrong with the grapes of wrath. i'm not the kind of person who easily understands things i can't touch and feel - like theories and symbolism - so everything i understood about the themes comes from what i've read. i'm told there's a great deal of metaphorical speak. personally, i didn't pick up on the greater half of it. i think people over analyze things like paintings and books. that said, i'll quote from analyses of the book (paraphrased) to share these themes.

the first obvious belief in this novel is that everyone is part of a community of some sort - the "emersonian oversoul" is the correct term, that everyone is connected and owes everyone else their money, time, and thoughts. at the same time, steinbeck hints that only poor people are capable of being a part of this oversoul - as ma states, "if you're in trouble or hurt or need - go to poor people. they're the only ones that'll help - the only ones."

through this connection, there's supposedly a kind of continuity to life. the turtle in chapter three symbolizes the perpetuation of the life circle, as does that whole creepy thing at the end with rose of sharon and the old guy. (i'll talk more about that in the "stupid dumb okies" section.)

as a commentary i read explains, "jim casy's reference to sin and virtue being part of the belief that all figures his concept of the oversoul, the one that all souls are just small parts of one large soul." first of all, what a load of garbage. (my apologies to anyone who believes this, i respect you, but nope. individualism in jesus christ for me!).

second, let's talk a little bit about jim casy. casy is an immoral, stinking old man who seduces young women while masquerading as a preacher. sounds like a special guy, right? honestly, i can't understand why this would be acceptable, even in the 1930s. maybe even more so in the '30s as far as the sleeping around side of it; less so as far as the age discrepancy probably present, etc.

now, back to the government. in this book, "government camps" are treated like a kind of heaven. who is paying for the government camps? the government. why? because the government's sole responsibility is to provide every need and comfort to the sojourners from oklahoma and other parts of the midwest. who ... the government wronged?

let's do a quick breakdown of what actually happened to the midwesterners beneath all the subterfuge of steinbeck's prose (more on that later).

- 1: stock market crashed in 1929.
-let's stop for a moment to note that it crashed because of the greedy american people who invested in it.
-but that's not the government's fault, really.
-the government shouldn't be involved in trade and business. it's not the government's job.
- 2: the banks all failed and there was no money to loan to folks.
-again, not the government, but whatevs.
- 3: in the midwest, over-worked lands and dry weather created the dust bowl.
-oh no did the government ruin the weather???
-stupid government.
- 4: new equipment got invented that could make farming easier.
-stupid government. inventing new farming equipment.
- 5: land-owners actually wanted to efficiently harvest crops rather than give charity to a whole ton of farmers.
-i hate the government.
-the government sucks.
-down with the government.
-(or rather gimme some more government, because only government can make this right, let's all be communists together.)
- 6: farmers got kicked off the land that they didn't own and had no right to stay on.
-(it's kinda weird that they have such loyalty to land they don't even own, but whatever.)
- 7: farmers moved west to california because they were uneducated and could not do anything but farm.
-dang, government. you're so mean.

look ... i hate the government myself. but for the exact opposite reason of this book. i hate the government because it seeks more power than it should have ... and people rely on it more than they ever should.

the government is there to govern. not to provide us good lives. the american dream is not "and then the united states gave us a good life free of charge." no, it's "the united states gave us the opportunity to work hard and, from the sweat of our brows, to build a good life."

sometimes that has been harder than others ... but for this particular event/issue you can't blame the government!

also, i want to take a moment to say that though conie is a terrible wishy-washy idiot, he kind of had the right idea with what the novel treats like "crazy dreams." if he got an education and went into some sort of technical line of work, he would have done well.

part 2: writing style

i read that steinbeck's style was influenced by the king james version of the bible. uh ... no. the kjv isn't quite so dead and hopeless. the grapes of wrath's style is dry, rambling, and boring. there's nothing happy, uplifting, poetic, or good about it. it's a lifeless droning. there's no real feeling in it - no real grasp of humanity.

most of the book consists of the meaningless conversations of one character with another character. they talk about everything under the sun - but it never gets anywhere. the rest of the book is extremely long descriptions which was sure to make you fall asleep. only the fact that i was driving while listening to this story kept me awake - that's for sure!

another literary technique steinbeck uses often is repetition. it's particularly evident in chapter seven. as my commentary says, the chapter "... is a staccato monologue delivered by a used car salesman pitching jalopies to dispossessed croppers."

well, it does show well how the salesman is manipulating the farmers, but it's still boring and could be cut down to maybe a few paragraphs. in fact, i'd say most of the book could be cut down to just a few paragraphs - the repetition isn't used just as a literary device, but rather the whole book is repetition.

it's true that repetition ingrains things into peoples' heads. i think the grapes of wrath is trying to ingrain the joad's whiny story into our heads.

there is no main character in this book. at first you say, "well, tom, of course!" but really, every minor character is the main character. it's confusing and makes it impossible to truly sympathize with everyone. you're left in apathy, not caring what happens to the characters.

which brings us to ...

part 3: stupid dumb okies

in california, they hate people from oklahoma and call them "okies," usually with five or six slurs attached. however, steinbeck does nothing whatsoever to counteract this. in fact, the "okies" are incredibly dumb! uh, good job grinding the reputation of oklahoma into the ground?

all of the joad family and most of the characters we meet are incredibly dumb. they do dumb things; they say dumb things; they personify idiocy! honestly, is anyone in this book likable at all? let's see:

there's tom. he's a many-time murderer who hates everyone and everything and isn't afraid to show it. he has a terrible temper and is known for lashing out at everyone in sight. he also sleeps around. a lot.

then there's ma. on the surface, she seems pretty cool, the calm and controlled one of the family. however, she is also pretty dumb, seeming to think that tom is actually a good guy. sorry, weak-willed mother. your children mostly suck? she was probably the best character of the story. also, you let your mentally disabled son wander off and didn't even go looking for him. good job.

jim casy is the former preacher who makes fun of the bible, of god, and basically everything related to christianity. he sleeps around even more than tom, seducing young women who he was supposed to be a spiritual guide to. so likable. he also doesn't believe that morals are a thing. though neither does anyone else in this book, to be fair.

rose of sharon joad (or rosasharn). she's a great character. whines about anything, thinks about nothing but herself, is generally weak-willed and annoying. at the end, she decides to nurse an old man who's dying of hunger. and i don't mean "nurse back to health." i mean, nurse, like one would nurse a baby. that's not creepy and disgusting at all. (another point against ma: she let that happen and in fact encouraged it. ma is actually a pretty bad ma, to be honest?)

pa joad is weak-willed and annoying and has no idea how to lead his family, leaving them hanging and letting ma take over.

al, the joad's teenage boy, could be summed up in two words: wants girls. he loves having sex, and he has sex all the times with multiple girls and brags on it. i just love this guy ... one of my favorites!

granpa joad. he cusses, walks around with his clothes unbuttoned ... and i mean even his underwear ... and is basically dirty filthy, inside and out. no grief when he dies. i didn't even care.

granma joad. she prays, but since christianity is a ridiculous stupid silly thing this is just ridiculous and leaves her open to ridicule. though to be fair she is 100% senile. but they treated this as comical and make fun of her, kinda? but when she dies, again, i wasn't that sad. like, okay, now we don't have to deal with her extremely annoying voice. all the same, it was sad how christianity is portrayed as something only a senile grandma could appreciate! that said, the book has no obligation to portray a religion in any light it so chooses, and as such, this is not a serious complaint. just a personal one.

uncle john. can't get over himself. *eye roll* he needs jesus' grace to move past his life, but of course no one in this novel will offer that to him. even when he almost asks for it. this was also sad, as he really deserved more. if only one person in this story had offered him love! people in this book suck.

ruthie. bossy and domineering little girl.

winfield. spoiled brat.

noah. actually, he's sweet ... i like him. but then in the end he wanders off. because the joad family are jerks and won't take care of their son who has a mental disability. i'm very sad for him, too. he deserved so much more!

part 4: plot (is there one?)

the basic "plot" of the book goes like this. (**spoilers included**, of course.)

1: tom gets out of jail (for murder). comes home, picks up filthy casy on the way. finds his family home abandoned. eventually makes his way to his uncle's farm more or less where his family is preparing to leave for california.

2: after chapters and chapters of absolute boring dry sentimental nonsense that is no help to anyone, let alone the plot, they head out to california. they slowly get there in another boring, long section. granma and granpa both die, by the way. no one really cares, though, let alone me.

3: they get to california. the work they thought they were going to get - even after they were warned several times by multiple people that there would be no work - isn't there.

4: they live at a bad camp, then they move to a government camp which is nice except there's still no work, so they don't have food. eventually they leave the government camp and go to another place where they pick peaches. connie abandons "rosasharn," his wife and tom's sister, at this point, and she whines a lot. even though she's the one who married the shiftless idiot. whatever.

5: anyway, at some point in here, tom's temper flares up once again. and now he's seriously in trouble and runs away from the family. good riddance to bad rubbish.

6: then they end up living in these abandoned boxcars as they pick cotton. and the river floods. and rosasharn's baby is stillborn, but at this point i couldn't care less. and after a couple days of living on a platform they built above the water in the boxcar, they decide to leave. although al stays behind. and at this point casy isn't around anymore, by the way. #dead

6: so they (everyone but al and the dead people and the people who have run off) walk down the road and it starts to rain. they go into this barn, there's a starving guy, and rosasharn offers him her breast milk, it is disgusting.

7: the end?

okay, isn't that the most exciting, interesting, intriguing plot, ever?!

i know, it's dry as a bone. i frankly don't know why or how anyone would enjoy it!

part 5: negative content

for my friends who want to know this kind of thing, i'm including a "family guide" of sorts.

profanity: g*ddamn in all its forms, g*d in all its forms, chr*st, j*sus chr*st, and several other forms of those words taken in a vary light way. tom's favorite expression, in fact, was "chr*st."

cussing: d*mn in all its forms, sh*t in all its forms, h*ll in all its forms, various other words. b*tch (and related words) in all its forms.

sexual: lots of kissing/necking/petting, etc. never described in great detail, but it's there. there's one scene where i believe rosasharn and connie have sex.

tom, casy, and al all talk about sleeping with women, degrading acts they've done with women, etc. as a woman, this made me super uncomfortable. many, many sexual jokes and innuendos and references.

other: death, destruction, murder, violence, scary scenes, police violence, mobs, scummy living conditions.

part end: conclusion

now, you can say whatever you want to me. you can say i didn't understand it. you can say i'm just a silly highschooler who doesn't know a thing about fine literature. but this is a 1-star book! it's six hundred pages of absolute nonsense delivered in a boring, dry way.

who would i recommend this book to? absolutely no one. don't waste your time. if you can get out of it, get out of it! your life is too precious to waste on the grapes of wrath.

there are other books about this historical period that are honest about life without resorting to nonsense, featuring characters who are actually worth relating to and imitating, and have a more realistic view of this complicated system that isn't the simple, "everything is the fault of the government."

why are so many high school students forced to read this?

thanks for reading,

~kellyn roth ...more flag 106 likes · like · see review view all 130 comments sep 02, 2016 natalie vellacott rated it did not like it shelves: classics this was a library book. i didn't get on with it at all despite trying to read it twice. i gave up about a third of the way through in the end.

it is about the life of one american family during the great depression. there is some beautiful creative writing in places but the story itself is so very slow. it just didn't hold my interest due to the lengthy dialogue between the characters who were talking about nothing in particular. it was like being a fly on the wall at a really dull tea party wh this was a library book. i didn't get on with it at all despite trying to read it twice. i gave up about a third of the way through in the end.

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i guess i probably shouldn't make such comments about something labelled a classic, but for me it was not. as a christian, i also found the language, particularly the regular blasphemy, offensive and would probably have stopped reading earlier for that reason had it not been a classic. i also didn't appreciate the early scenes where the local vicar was using his position to bed all of the young women in his parish.

i don't recommend this book due to the language, the sexual content and the monotony, i'm sorry i wasted a few hours on it. i consider that i have carried out my duty by advising you, fellow readers, not to do the same. ...more flag 106 likes · like · see review view all 79 comments sep 11, 2016 michael finocchiaro rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: made-into-movie, favorites, pulitzer-fiction, american-20th-c, novels, classics, pulitzer-winning-fiction, fiction, nobel-lit, national-book-award

steinbeck's classic blew me away again with the power of its vision, the depth of its character, and the realism of its dialogs. i also rewatched the movie and found it to be relatively faithful to the book. a few things were dropped (the wilsons, noah's leaving, the pathos-laden ending with rosasharon in the farmhouse) and a few things were swapped around (the government camp and the peach camp), but henry fonda did a perfect performance as the interesting tom joad whose character arc goes from somewhat hardened criminal to socially conscious drifter. i also loved casy and found john carradine stupendous in that role.

the narration of the book has three voices: the third party narration of the joad family's trials and tribulations; a more sweeping, journalistic voice about the larger political and social context; and a closeup into the thoughts and actions of people implied on the fringes (most notably the roadside cafés which play a role twice in the primary narrative - younger's tom's initial ride to the farm, older tom's purchase of bread and candy). i feel that this technique was borrowed in principle at least from the dos passos usa trilogy - the closeups reminded me of the camera eye sections and the sweeping passages of the newsreel sections.

the book itself tells the story of the joads and by extension of an entire generation of mid-western farmers in the us that were forced off their land after the dust bowl, a period of several years of famine, to seek their fortunes in a promised land out west in california. the harsh realities of life on the road, the prejudice of stationary observers towards the "oakies", and the exploitation by farmers and farming associations of the labor surplus are painfully delineated. there is nonetheless some great humor (ma's beating a man with a chicken as told by tom, ruthie and winfield's discovery of the toilets, etc) in here and some great moments of humanity - primarily in casy's speeches and in my all-time favorite one, "wherever there's a man, i'll be there too" by tom.

the relationships in the book, particularly between ma and tom are beautifully drawn and yet the minor characters are also given time to change with the situations. of course, not everyone makes it to the land of milk and honey, and the land itself does not welcome them with open arms but rather with rejection and disdain.

as for the historical context, it is hard for us to get exact numbers, but somewhere between 400,000 and 3.5m people were displaced from the great plains area that was affected by the drought and violent dust storms between 1931 and 1939 during which 75% of the topsoil was wiped out in the oklahoma panhandle, western kansas, eastern colorado, and northern texas. not all of the displaced went to california, nonetheless, it is estimated that 1/8 of today's california population are descendants of survivors of the dust bowl. it is also hard to estimate the number of deaths, but most sources settle on a number of about 7000 primarily from malnutrition and disease (both hinted at in the book, of course).

steinbeck depicts this vividly with sharply drawn images and an appeal to our emotions: we see that

unfortunately, the great depression has also impacted california and there are no jobs there either. it is important to note his insight that it was not just farmers that were driven from the land: in the book at the first stop for the joads, they meet a shopkeeper who left because he had no more customers. in fact, people from across the economic spectrum were impacted and forced to rethink their means of getting an income.

also important to this book is the fact that it was not just climate change that pushed people off the land, it was also the ruthlessness of banks and speculators as well as technological change. this period represents a shift from manual sharecropping of smallish plots to the massive scale of industrialized agriculture. the heartlessness with which the guys in suits drive the joads and their neighbors of their land is shocking, and yet realistic. the practice of printing handbills for wide distribution in order to drive down labor prices as well as the labeling any resistance to falling wages as "red" was a powerful theme in the book.

there is a feeling of inevitableness, but also injustice as few provisions were made by the government for these victims of change, and the gutting of legislation to protect small landholders from rapacious actions by the large financial interests during the coolidge, harding, and hoover administrations left gaping holes in the safety net.

an absolute american masterpiece, there is no question in my mind of this novel deserving the 1940 pulitzer prize over other great books like chandler's the big sleep and tropic of capricorn also being published in 1939. this one just has an eternal, lasting perfection to it. grapes of wrath was one of the primary sources quoted when steinbeck was awarded the nobel prize for literature in 1962. his moving acceptance speech here.

my votable list of pulitzer winners which i have read (only have the 40s, 50s, and 60s to finish!): ...more flag 125 likes · like · see review view all 21 comments mar 20, 2013 dolors rated it it was amazing · review of another edition recommends it for: those with grit enough to keep the faith recommended to dolors by: bruce springsteen shelves: dost, best-ever, read-in-2014 oklahoma, 1939. tractors invade the barren plains, ruining crops, demolishing houses, stripping farmers of their livelihood, leaving only billows of dust and ransacked land behind. bewildered families choke with disbelief at the lame excuses of the landowners who blame a *monster bigger than them*. not the severe droughts, not the iron machines, not their useless greed, but the bank, the bank forced them to do it.

and so a pilgrimage of thousands of destitute families to the promised land of calif oklahoma, 1939. tractors invade the barren plains, ruining crops, demolishing houses, stripping farmers of their livelihood, leaving only billows of dust and ransacked land behind. bewildered families choke with disbelief at the lame excuses of the landowners who blame a *monster bigger than them*. not the severe droughts, not the iron machines, not their useless greed, but the bank, the bank forced them to do it.

and so a pilgrimage of thousands of destitute families to the promised land of california where the valleys are ripe with fresh hope and sweet grapes begins, and the roads become a limbless reptile hauling an endless tail of wrecked trucks and rootless people who have exchanged their living heritage for the expectation of honest jobs and decent lives.

a debunked list of thwarted illusions and betrayed promises awaits the *joads*, the protagonists of steinbeck's tale of protest and epitomization of countless second rate americans who had to endure the degradation of being treated like cattle, the marginalization of inhuman living conditions and the bigoted treatment of their fellow citizens as a result of the great depression's climatic, social and economic debacle.

more than seventy years later, steinbeck's denouncement of the effects of an abusive system that endorses laws of supply and demand over humanity and social justice mirrors the precarious situation of many developed countries that are struggling against unmanageable unemployment rates and massive migratory movements, which elevates the writer's prophetic voice of protest to an enduring literary classic that speaks on its own.

"the grapes of wrath" is composed of juxtaposed symphonic alternating movements. short, jazzy and lyrical chapters combining journalistic language with spiritual rhythms give an atemporal view on the migrant drama, which in turn arise as premonitory for the interweaved longer narrative chapters depicting the joad family's exodus to california and their symbolic plight for moral equity.

framed in bold dialogue and raw dialectical jargon, a menagerie of styles, dissonant voices, folk wisdom and biblical imagery gives shape to the mystic soul of the book, which orbits around two concentric points: land and family.

when the joads are obliged to abandon their farm they are also deprived of their dignity, of their ancestry, of their roots. once the land is lost, drastic developments threaten the family unit but *ma joad*, tough and vulnerable mother, resilient and respectful wife, gentle and brawly cornerstone of the joads' collective willpower, and her son tom, the male counterpoint to ma's ability to adapt, personify the indignation that fuels the spark of revolt to preserve self-respect in front of implacable adversity.

but when hope becomes desperation, desperation melts in prayer, prayer degenerates into hunger and hunger ferments in wrath and the skies break lose in floods of misfortune and a mother caresses the disfigured face of her son in the dark, the debilitated bonds that kept the family together shatter silently in fragmented impotence and paralyzing vexation, leaving only one absolute, pulsating soul that speaks for all people, the ghost of tom joad:

"then it don't matter. then i'll be aroun' in the dark. i'll be ever'where – wherever you look. wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, i'll be there. wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy. i'll be there. 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."

and this is how steinbeck's polyvalent epic evolves from socio-economic determinism to numinous spirituality, for the fury of losing land and lineage metamorphoses into a chant of redemptive love for mankind that overcomes individual boundaries, temporal limits and material needs and rekindles a perdurable harmonious faith that can only be born of the most inexhaustible and universal compassion.

"the people in flight from terror behind – strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever." ...more flag 104 likes · like · see review view all 99 comments may 03, 2020 dave schaafsma rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: fiction-20th-century, best-books-ever 4/14/21: on this day in 1939, john steinbeck published this book, not satisfied it was any good, but acknowledging "it was the best he could do." he thought many readers would object to the book's political statement.

i first read grapes of wrath in high school, then again taught it in a rural parochial (christian) high school) in western michigan in the late seventies. i loved teaching that book, that had been a staple of the modern novels elective class there for many years, but that year one 4/14/21: on this day in 1939, john steinbeck published this book, not satisfied it was any good, but acknowledging "it was the best he could do." he thought many readers would object to the book's political statement.

i first read grapes of wrath in high school, then again taught it in a rural parochial (christian) high school) in western michigan in the late seventies. i loved teaching that book, that had been a staple of the modern novels elective class there for many years, but that year one of the more conservative parents complained to the school board that the book was immoral, not consistent with the values of the community. he saw that his son was being required to read it, recalled reading the book and found it personally offensive. he thought the swearing was excessive (made a list of the swear words used), there was an ex-preacher in the book that had slept with some of his female parishioners he took objection to, and the final scene in the book, where a young nursing mother who has lost her child feeds a starving man, he found disgusting. if he had dug a little deeper he might have discovered that the author of the book, john steinbeck, was also once a member of the communist party. we might have then had just enough evidence to burn it.

the only member of the school board that had read the book was the chairman of the board, who thought it was a very good book, but none of the other members had read it, nor would they, and they voted to remove it from our english curriculum, though they--sensing a possible insurrection from students and teachers---allowed us to finish teaching the book. why fear an uprising? as i knew the board was meeting to vote on the book, i invited my students to write essays for them on the question of the book's morality, and several of them wrote stirring defenses of the book, to no avail. i am sure our reading of the remainder of that book was some of the most passionate learning i have ever been part of, and i will never forget my engaged, thoroughly committed students; i loved them (some [minor] students bought me bottles of wine when we were done reading it) and the book; what a great and anguished experience for us all.

thanks to phillip, here is a link to an npr stpry on how it is this book got banned in california and other places:
npr.org/templates/story/s...

when john steinbeck wrote the grapes of wrath he had spent time in the camps in california. he had helped organize farm workers for a living wage. he had seen first hand the lowering of wages for hundreds of thousands of americans in his state to the point of starvation and disease. when he wrote the book he had the king james version of the holy bible with him at all times, i had read, hoping to have his passionate prose echo its lyrical tone.

the story, which is at its base a critique of the inhumanity of unbridled capitalism, a story of man-made environmental disaster and the strength of the human spirit in the face of unspeakable challenges and tragedy, focuses primarily on one family, the joads, one of thousands who lost their farms in the "dust bowl" era in the thirties when adequate safety nets were not available, when there was no unemployment relief, when adequate action was still a dream, when american citizens were actually refugees in their own country, when people starved in the streets for lack of a crust of bread. in other words, it is both historical fiction and a cautionary tale, a time of economic depression and people (often, and largely) hating each other in their struggles rather than supporting each other in crisis.

the joads--ma, pa, uncle john, tom, noah, rose of sharon, grandpa, and grandma, ruthie and winfield, their dogs, accompanied for a time by ex-preacher jim casey--were living through a drought, their farms had become clouds of dust, they couldn't raise crops, so they couldn't make mortgage payments to the bank as hundreds of thousands could not, they were pushed off their land, their house and barn razed,

"sure, cried the tenant men, but it's our land. . . we were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. even if it's no good, it's still ours. . . that's what makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it."

and they, from oklahoma, called "okies" and worse, saw flyers for jobs in california and suddenly they and a whole area country headed west for twenty times fewer jobs than there were people. and what happens in a capitalist system when that happens? wages go down to criminal levels, prices stay up, and food is literally kerosened or dumped into ditches in front of starving people (as is now being done!!).

"dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth.

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

hatred is showered on poor people for their poverty, for their willingness to attempt to feed their families for less money, for impossibly low wages, police forces are doubled to move people along, doctors won't see these refugees, these migrants, these "shitheels," and prices are gouged by their fellow americans for almost every essential item.

let's just pause a second and think of the environmental disaster in syria that created waves of migrants/refugees all over europe, and that wall at the us-mexican border, and the ongoing refugee crises all over the world and see if you think this might be a useful book for us to again read.

the structure of the book includes a close reading of one family's tale alternating with the story of the situation writ a little larger, with unnamed folks appearing, inter-calary chapters that allow the author to help us understand the economic crisis and its human/moral costs on a broader, systemic level, and lyrical/metaphorical interludes such as one featuring a turtle persistently trying to cross a highway.

the key theme is that the people can stand against the rich and powerful if they are unified, if they are one, if they see themselves as ma tells them they must be, a family, supporting each other with love and decency. that final scene in the rain reminds me of the father and son at the end of cormac mccarthy's the road: you do the right thing and live the right way until you die. but while tender acts of charity are present, there are also warnings in the book: if you keep a family from feeding its children that rage--the grapes of wrath--will come to pass. the people will come together to save themselves.

". . . and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. in the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."

ma emerges as the matriarchal moral center of the book, and women are seen as the central foundation of human survival. which makes sense more now than ever.

"she seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken."

and along the way they learn moral/political lessons in the face of police crackdowns on the hungry:

"and the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed."

"if he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an' maybe he's disappointed that nothin' he can do 'll make him feel rich."

"we're sorry. it's not us. it's the monster. the bank isn't

seventeen of his works, including the grapes of wrath (1940), cannery row (1945), the pearl (1947), and east of eden (1952), went on to become hollywood films, and steinbeck also achieved success as a hollywood writer, receiving an academy award nomination for best story in 1944 for alfred hitchcock's lifeboat. ...more books by john steinbeck more... articles featuring this booklove grows up in the new aristotle and dante novel benjamin alire sáenz, author of aristotle and dante discover the secrets of the universe and many other award-winning ya and children's books,...read more...119 likes · 14 comments trivia about the grapes of wrath 124 trivia questions 10 quizzes more quizzes & trivia... quotes from the grapes of wrath "there ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. there's just stuff people do." — 3433 likes "and the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed." — 1610 likes more quotes...

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overview

not only one of steinbeck's greatest works, the grapes of wrath (1939) has also secured its place as one of the most famous novels in the entire american literary canon. the final piece of steinbeck's labor trilogy—following in dubious battle (1936) and of mice and men (1937)—the grapes of wrath was written between march and october 1938. an instant bestseller upon publication, fifteen million copies of the book have been sold, with another 150,000 being added annually. the grapes of wrath, which has been translated into dozens of languages, was awarded the pulitzer prize for literature, and played an important role in steinbeck winning the nobel prize in 1962.

many facets of steinbeck's life helped shape the text. inspiration came from the 1937 documentary short the plow that broke the plains, directed by steinbeck acquaintance pare lorentz; the film shows the harsh conditions that existed in the dust bowl region. steinbeck witnessed labor struggles as large numbers of migrants arrived in california, and he had the opportunity to tour labor camps and interview migrant families. in the winter of 1938, steinbeck saw firsthand the miserable conditions brought on by intense flooding in visalia, ca.

these experiences, along with a series of san francisco news articles called "the harvest gypsies" and a satire titled "l'affaire lettuceberg" which steinbeck later destroyed, planted the seeds for telling the grapes of wrath in a more realistic, objective fashion.steinbeck chronicled the novel's progress in a journal he kept while writing, published posthumously as working days: the journals of the grapes of wrath(1989).

in 1940, 20th century fox released a film adaptation of the novel; directed by john ford, the movie went on to win two academy awards, for best director and best supporting actress (jane darwell as ma joad). the grapes of wrath has also been adapted for the stage, as an opera and a play.

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