

# Pilgrimage and Communitas in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

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## Abstract

This article examines John Steinbeck's 1939 American realist novel *The Grapes of Wrath* through the lens of pilgrimage and rites of passage. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck depicts the migration of the Joads, an impoverished Oklahoman family journeying west during the American Great Depression. By drawing on Victor and Edith Turner's analysis of liminality and *communitas*, this article seeks to examine the family's journey as an act of pilgrimage. Ultimately, through their experience of displacement, travel and Turnerian *communitas*, the Joads evolve to realise their place within a larger, universal humanity. This article also compares the family's migration to that of the Biblical Patriarchs, seeking to add further dimension to previous examinations of the novel's Christian motifs.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage, rites of passage, communitas, Great Depression, American literature, John Steinbeck

Well, the highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kidding nobody about where it goes  
I'm sitting down here in the campfire light  
Searching for the ghost of Tom Joad<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was an American author whose novels focused on landscape, human suffering, and the exploitation of the working class during the Great Depression. Following the publication of *Tortilla Flat* (1935), Steinbeck was commissioned by *The San Francisco News* to document the lives of migrant workers in California's Salinas Valley.<sup>2</sup> His next major literary success, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), was among a series of fiction and non-fiction works expounding these observations. *The Grapes of Wrath* traces the imagined narrative of the Joads, a prideful, impoverished Oklahoman family migrating during the Great Depression. The novel was well-received, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1940, and is considered a major work of American literature. Steinbeck's deep concerns with social injustice and affiliations with the Communist party during the Cold War and McCarthy era have led many critics to associate him with Marxism, although he resisted the label politically.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Springsteen, 'The Ghost of Tom Joad', *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (Columbia Records, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Frances Miller LaBell, *Journalism and Literature: The Link Between John Steinbeck's Early Reporting and His Novel 'The Grapes of Wrath'*, Master's thesis (Michigan State University, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Willis, 'John Steinbeck and the "Stalking Horror" of Communism', *The Steinbeck Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2009), pp. 111-113.

Although Steinbeck was not overtly religious, his observations of American life reflect a fascination with Biblical stories, Christian ethics, and the spiritual struggles of everyday people. His novels inhabit a world in which human beings, though flawed and complex, have the capacity for compassion, love, and redemption. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, these values are particularly epitomised through the spiritual transformation of the family's eldest son, Tom Joad. Following a long journey to California, the family's search for work ends not in triumph, but in desperation. At the close of the narrative, the Joads are destitute, scattered, and forced to seek shelter in an abandoned barn. The larger systemic injustices the family have faced – economic inequality, exploitation, and prejudice – are left unsolved. Nonetheless, *The Grapes of Wrath* concludes with Tom and his sister, Roseasharn, epitomising the family's transition from individualism to a state of humility and perseverance, connected to all humanity.



Figure 1. John Steinbeck (Wikimedia Commons).

Scholars have long considered the Christian elements of the novel, including the family's journey as a representation of the Exodus narrative and Tom as a Christ-figure.<sup>4</sup> This article seeks to expand on the rich tradition of Steinbeck scholarship through a consideration of the Joad family's journey as an act of pilgrimage, making frequent reference to Victor and Edith Turner's influential analysis of pilgrimage and ritual.<sup>5</sup> Within anthropology, a pilgrimage is typically understood as a journey to a site of religious significance.<sup>6</sup> Pilgrimage outcomes differ

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Eckert, 'Exodus Inverted: A New Look at *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2009) 340-357; J. R. C. Perkin, 'Exodus Imagery in *The Grapes of Wrath*', in *Literature and the Bible*, ed. D. Bevan (London: Brill, 1993) pp. 79-93; Charles T. Dougherty, 'Round Table: The Christ-Figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *College English*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1962), pp. 224-226.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 1969); Victor Turner, 'The Centre Out There: Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1973), pp. 191-230; Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> John Eade and Evgenia Mesaritou, 'Pilgrimage', in *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (2018). At: 10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0195.

between individuals and religious traditions, but are often associated with renewed purpose, spiritual clarity, and connection with the divine. The process exists within many cultures and traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. An approach to *The Grapes of Wrath* that considers Turner's theory of pilgrimage, underscored by recent scholarship that has expanded the definition to include secular mobilities,<sup>7</sup> brings to the fore a much-needed consideration of the family's journey, though born of economic need, as the principal reason for their shift from self-interest to collective action.

## Methodology

Victor Turner's analysis of the rituals of the Ndembu people of Zambia, and later, with his wife, Edith, the processes of European Catholicism, are perhaps the formative texts in the study of religious pilgrimage.<sup>8</sup> His theory of ritual processes and social change, first outlined in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, is rooted in the functionalist orientation of Emile Durkheim, who viewed religion as a socially conservative force that emerged from the need to maintain harmony and integration between different parts of a society.<sup>9</sup> In *The Ritual Process*, Turner combines a functionalist perspective of religion with anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's concept of *liminality*. For van Gennep, rituals function as *rites of passage* marking an individual's transition from one social status to another.<sup>10</sup> Van Gennep defined liminality as a period of uncertainty and ambiguity experienced during the middle stage of a rite of passage.<sup>11</sup> Turner differs from Durkheim and van Gennep, however, in his belief that rites of passage act to uproot the social order, rather than maintain it, and in his location of an additional stage of rites of passage: *communitas*.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Ritual Process*, Turner defines *communitas* as a spontaneously articulated sense of heightened belonging and egalitarianism felt within members of a community who have undergone the same initiation rite.<sup>13</sup> For Turner, *communitas* was fundamentally an 'anti-structure' of ordinary social life, distinction, and morality, as he believed that it functioned as a paradigm shift through which new visions of life could be realised.<sup>14</sup> Turner expanded on his articulation of pilgrimage as a ritual process in a later journal article titled "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal." Here, he further differentiated between the three forms of *communitas* first introduced in *The Ritual Process*: existential, normative, and ideological *communitas*.<sup>15</sup> These will be discussed in detail later. Turner's theory has had wide-reaching influence,

<sup>7</sup> John Eade and Simon Coleman, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London: Routledge, 2004); Alex Norman, *Religion, Pilgrimage and Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*; Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, 'Ritual', in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds Will Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 264.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bem Le Hunte, 'Liminality', in *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of the Possible*, ed. V. P. Glaveanu (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), p. 836.

<sup>12</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 139.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, 'The Centre Out There', pp. 193-194.

particularly within the fields of Anthropology, Performance Studies, and the study of countercultural movements.<sup>16</sup>

In "The Centre Out There," Turner complicates the traditional view of pilgrimage as a mandatory process by exploring how it may be undertaken voluntarily. Central to this reconsideration is the ability of liminality to remove a pilgrim from their economic, social, and political obligations by positioning them outside of the normative structures of society.<sup>17</sup> This more liberal definition of pilgrimage has been particularly influential to later scholars such as Alex Norman, Simon Coleman, and John Eade, who have argued for the decentring of religion as a necessary component of pilgrimage and consider the process, rather, as constituted by various forms of motion out of which pilgrims derive meaning and purpose.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Turner's continued impact within the fields of Anthropology and Religious Studies, a common critique of his model is that it finds little support outside of Western, Christian traditions.<sup>19</sup> However, for the argument presented here, it is the Christian basis of Turner's theory of pilgrimage that makes it directly relevant to the journey depicted in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

## Narrative Analysis

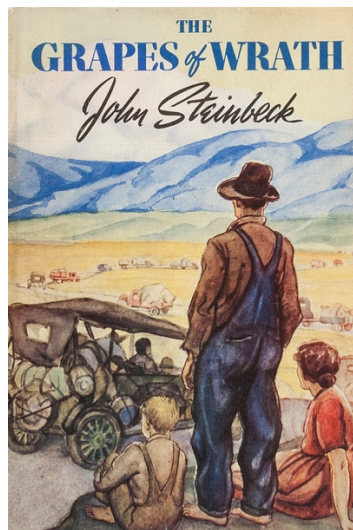


Figure 2. Cover of the first edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* (Wikimedia Commons)

The driving narrative force of *The Grapes of Wrath* is the separation of the Joad family from their farm in rural Oklahoma. At the beginning of the novel, after serving time in prison for murder, Tom Joad learns from a neighbour, Muley, that mass-scale agricultural farming and the Great Depression have forced the banks to evict his family from their property. From the onset of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck establishes that the Joad family have a profound spiritual connection with their land. This is made clear when Tom explains to Jim Casy, the local itinerant preacher he chances upon outside the family property, of the memories

<sup>16</sup> Grime, 'Ritual', p. 266.

<sup>17</sup> Turner 'The Centre Out There', p. 200.

<sup>18</sup> Norman, *Religion, Pilgrimage and Tourism*, p. 104; Eade and Coleman, *Reframing Pilgrimage*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (eds), *Contesting the Sacred: An Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock), p. 5.

associated with the farm perimeter:

Joad pointed to the boundary fence. “That there’s our line. We didn’t really need no fence there, but we had wire, an’ Pa kinda liked her there ... Wouldn’t of had the fence if Uncle John didn’ come drivin’ in one night with six spools of wire in his wagon ...” Joad’s eyes were inward on his memory.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 3. Caddo, Oklahoma during the Great Depression, 1938 (Wikimedia Commons).

The family’s mythologisation of their holding is contrasted with the economic desires of the agricultural corporations. George Henderson argues that *The Grapes of Wrath* should be understood as narratively driven by the conflict between two opposing structures.<sup>21</sup> In this case, capitalist agribusiness and the small social unit of the Joad family dynamically oppose one another to exaggerate the brutal dispossession of rural Oklahoman smallholders.<sup>22</sup> The Joads’ familiarity with their property and realisation of the magic inherent to the American landscape opposes the modernised production and industrialised farming technologies of the banks, who are depicted in Chapter Five as “insects” and “monsters” indifferent to the destruction of family histories and personal legacies:

Across the dooryard the tractor cut, and the hard, foot-beaten ground was seeded field, and the tractor cut through again; the uncut space was ten feet wide ... The tractor cut a straight line on, and the air and the ground vibrated with its thunder. The tenant man stared after it, his rifle in his hand. His wife was beside him, and the quiet children behind. And all of them stared after the tractor.<sup>23</sup>

The land’s importance to the Dust Bowl farmers is further articulated through Muley’s decision to remain in Oklahoma. After being asked by Tom why he would rather endure poverty than

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<sup>20</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Penguin Random House, 2000 [1939]), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> George Henderson, ‘John Steinbeck’s Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*: A Critical Essay’, *California History*, vol. 68, no. 4 (1990), p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> Henderson, ‘John Steinbeck’s Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*’, p. 214.

<sup>23</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 41.

follow his family to California, Muley replies, "They ain't gettin' rid a me ... I ain't a-goin'. My pa come here fifty years ago. An' I ain't a-goin'."<sup>24</sup> Henderson believes that creeks and ditches, such as those in which Muley sleeps, are used by Steinbeck as metaphors of human resistance to capitalist production.<sup>25</sup> These spaces, untouched by the labour processes of American industry, are areas in which individuals can assert their autonomy and spiritual identity.<sup>26</sup> As the Joads, like Muley, have a deep connection with the land, their decision to emigrate to California is not a rejection of their spiritual affinity with Oklahoma. Rather, it is the point at which they become pilgrims.<sup>27</sup> Seeking to escape from the economic and social despair of Oklahoma, in Chapter Nine, the Joads experience a separation from the family farm, a previous place of 'structure,' for an unfamiliar yet idealised land they intend to shape to their desires.



Figure 4. Dustbowl affected farm in South Dakota (Wikimedia Commons).

In this sense, the story of the Joads can be compared to that of the biblical Patriarchs. In the Old Testament, God calls on Abraham to lead his family into the desert, promising them blessings and nationhood.<sup>28</sup> Even though God does not reveal the family's destination, Abraham places complete trust in His plan. After decades of travel, Abraham, and later, his descendants, Isaac and Jacob (Israel), reach the promised land of Canaan. There, like the Joads, hardship and economic conditions force the tribe to emigrate to Egypt. According to Jana M. Bennett, the Biblical narrative is ultimately that of a family migration driven by the hope of deliverance. Abraham's decision to leave the familiarity of life with his father, Terah, in favour of a migratory, pilgrim-like existence, is guided by his profound faith in the protection and guidance of his God.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Henderson, 'John Steinbeck's Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*', p. 219.

<sup>26</sup> Henderson, 'John Steinbeck's Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*', p. 221.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, 'The Centre Out There', p. 200.

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 12:1-2

<sup>29</sup> Jana M. Bennett, 'On Pilgrimage with Abraham: How a Patriarch Leads Us in Formation in Faith', *Journal of Moral Theology*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2021), p. 28.

The Joad family, too, are driven by belief. For Ma Joad, California is envisioned as a utopian, Edenic place where opportunity and dignity await. Her desires for the family are largely economic in nature, as they revolve around establishing a “little white house in among the orange trees.”<sup>30</sup> In this sense, though the family’s pilgrimage lacks an overtly religious destination, it carries with it a strong sense of purpose and the promise of salvation.

From Chapter Ten through to Chapter Eighteen, as the Joads approach California, the family begins to pass through the transitional phase of Turnerite pilgrimage in which the “law, custom, convention and ceremonial” qualities of ordinary life dissipate.<sup>31</sup> This section of the novel has been compared by some scholars to the Exodus narrative, with California standing as the ‘promised land’ offering hope, freedom, and prosperity to the struggling settlers.<sup>32</sup> However, this interpretation has been critiqued by academics such as Kenneth Eckert, who contends that Steinbeck’s portrayal of the Joads’ journey more closely mirrors a reversal of the Exodus story.<sup>33</sup> In this view, California is not the land of milk and honey, but a barren wasteland in which the Joads are once more oppressed by agricultural corporations and are unable to re-establish a connection with the landscape. What is important to this discussion is the Joads family’s parallels with the wandering exiles of Israel. Like the Israelites, the family experience “the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes.”<sup>34</sup> This is most aptly expressed through the anxieties of the family’s youngest children upon passing through Oklahoma City:

Ruthie and Winfield saw it all, and it embarrassed them with its bigness and its strangeness, and it frightened them with the fine-clothed people they saw. They did not speak of it to each other. Later – they would, but not now.<sup>35</sup>

It is at this point in the novel that a sense of camaraderie begins to develop amongst the migrant families. According to Turner, liminal phenomena occur “in an out of secular structures” that have ceased to exist and are yet to fragment into the undifferentiated hierarchy of *communitas*.<sup>36</sup> We see this within a passage of Chapter Thirteen in which Tom argues with a gas station worker who expresses distaste at the family’s financial position. After Tom defends his migration, both men remove their hats as a sign of mutual respect.<sup>37</sup> The worker then reveals that his family, too, is “talkin’ about packin’ up an’ movin’ west.”<sup>38</sup> In this instance, the “hierarchical system of politico-legal economic positions” instrumental to the American capitalist system in *The Grapes of Wrath* begins to fall away.<sup>39</sup> According to Turner, it is following this experience of liminal phenomena, or the “limbo of statuslessness,”<sup>40</sup> that

<sup>30</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard A. Slade, ‘The use of Biblical allusions in *The Grapes of Wrath*’, *CLA Journal*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (1968); Perkin, ‘Exodus Imagery in *The Grapes of Wrath*’, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> Eckert, ‘Exodus Inverted’.

<sup>34</sup> Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, ‘Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change’, *International Political Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2009), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 134.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 97.

pilgrims typically experience *communitas* – an unstructured, egalitarian period of heightened solidarity.



Figure 5. Squatter camp of agricultural labour migrants outside of Sacramento, California, 1940 (Wikimedia Commons).

*Communitas* is most present in *The Grapes of Wrath* in the makeshift camps established by migrant families on the roadsides of the major highways leading west. This expression of *communitas* can be aptly described using Turner's categories of normative or ideological *communitas* as it occurs through the "need to mobilise and organise resources" and links to a greater "utopian" model of society.<sup>41</sup> While existential *communitas* is certainly depicted within *The Grapes of Wrath*, the unities amongst migrant families emerge out of enduring struggle, rather than moments of sudden, short-lived solidarity. Mutual respect and generosity are the defining features of the family's interaction with two fellow migrants, Sairy and Wilson, who invite them to share in the warmth of their camp outside the town of Bethany, Oklahoma:

The lean face broke into a smile, "Why sure, come on off the road. Proud to have ya." And he called, "Sairy, there's some folks goin' ta stay with us. Come on out an' say how d'ya do."... When she spoke her voice had a beautiful low timbre, soft and modulated, and yet with ringing overtones. "Tell 'em' welcome," she said. "Tell 'em good an' welcome."<sup>42</sup>

Later that night, as the family are preparing to sleep, Grampa, the patriarch of the family, dies unexpectedly. Like Muley, Grampa was adamant to remain in Oklahoma – a land that had provided his family with spiritual connection and identity for generations. This scene both expresses the trauma of the Joad family's pilgrimage and the sense of unity that is developing amongst the displaced migrants. Despite her own struggles, Sairy comes to the Joad family's

<sup>41</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 132.

<sup>42</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 140.



aid and offers a quilt to wrap Grampa's body, telling the adamantly refusing Ma that she is "proud to help. I ain't felt so – safe in a long time. People needs – to help."<sup>43</sup> This collective bond becomes stronger throughout the following chapters as the workers settle into the rhythm of transitory life and begin to liberate themselves from American society's capitalist social formations:

Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus. At first the families were timid in the building and tumbling worlds, but gradually the technique of building worlds became their technique. Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes came into being.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 6. Transient camp, 1937 (Wikimedia Commons).

It is at this point in *The Grapes of Wrath* that the most important aspect of Turner's theory of *communitas* comes into play – the phenomena as a "dangerous and anarchical" social formation that must "be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions and conditions" by those concerned with maintaining "structure."<sup>45</sup> The state authorities view the idyllic temporary settlements of the migrants as threats to industrialist hegemony in the west. The Weedpatch government camp, which the Joads settle in upon reaching California, is the ultimate antithesis to police control. The dance scene of Chapter Twenty-Four symbolises the clash between the working men and women, united in grassroots freedom and creativity, and the police officers, intent on reinstating government control over the non-hierarchical community. This is because the citizens of the Weedpatch camp, who have grown to see the communal benefit of anti-capitalist organising, represent the "poor and deformed" participants of Turnerian pilgrimage and "appear to symbolise the moral values of *communitas* as against the coercive power of the supreme political rulers."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 147.

<sup>44</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 203.

<sup>45</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 110.

Though kind and warm to those they meet, until the murder of Casy by anti-unionist forces in Chapter Twenty-Eight, the Joad family have largely been concerned with their own survival and happiness over that of others. Eckert has identified this as a “haughty, isolated attitude.”<sup>47</sup> The men of the family are desperate to work, even if it means that others cannot, and the murder committed by Tom at the onset of the novel was largely driven by self-righteousness.<sup>48</sup> Until Casy's death, self-sufficiency and maintenance of the domestic realm are capitalist virtues through which the family maintain their morality.<sup>49</sup> From Chapters Twenty-Two to Thirty, following Casy's murder and their experience of egalitarian, communal living at the Weedpatch camp, the family, and Tom, in particular, experience a profound spiritual transformation. Fleeing retribution from the police, Tom escapes to the creek, where, like Christ, he finds “kinship to a humanity beyond the family boundary, and [comes] into a sense of overarching social purpose.”<sup>50</sup> In realising his future as a unionist, Tom disregards his previous role as head of a family that is intent on preserving a traditional family structure centred on land ownership and self-protection. Like Abraham, he steps beyond the bounds of ordinary life to live in accordance with a greater calling.<sup>51</sup> As a pilgrim who has experienced Turnerian communitas, Tom is transformed to care for all working-class people and concludes his journey with a reconsideration of America's political and economic structure.

The family follows in his footsteps. *The Grapes of Wrath* ends with the Joads finding refuge in an abandoned barn during a storm. There, they happen upon a starving man, who the family's adult daughter, Roseasharn, who had recently given birth to a stillborn baby, feeds with her breast. Though the Joads have returned to their “former mundane experience,” finding not a utopia in California but a land beset by corporate greed, they have nonetheless “made a spiritual step forward.”<sup>52</sup> Though scattered and destitute, the family conclude their pilgrimage with the realisation of their place in the “universal fellowship” of humanity.<sup>53</sup> This fellowship is one that is both anti-capitalist and Christian in nature, as it relies on both unity amongst the disenfranchised and a shared sentiment of morality and love:

Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has analysed the Joad family's journey through the lens of pilgrimage and Victor and Edith Turner's model of rites of passage. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck explores economic equality, human dignity, and the struggle for survival in the Great Depression. His critique of American capitalism, informed by his associations with Marxism, are implicitly

<sup>47</sup> Eckert, ‘Exodus Inverted’, p. 349.

<sup>48</sup> Leonard Lutwack (1971), as cited in Eckert, ‘Exodus Inverted’, p. 349.

<sup>49</sup> Eckert, ‘Exodus Inverted’, p. 349.

<sup>50</sup> Henderson, ‘John Steinbeck's Spatial Imagination in *The Grapes of Wrath*’, p. 221.

<sup>51</sup> Bennet, ‘On Pilgrimage with Abraham’, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Eckert, ‘Exodus Inverted’, p. 355.

<sup>54</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 476.

woven into the Joad family's failure to achieve a materially desirable life in the promised land of the American west. Through tracing the Joad's migration to California, *The Grapes of Wrath* is also an exploration of the transformative potential of movement and travel. This article offers a new contribution to *The Grapes of Wrath* scholarship by bringing to focus the Joad's experience of poverty, migration, and dislocation as the basis for the intellectual and spiritual development they experience at the conclusion of the novel.

Although compelled to travel by a combination of economic desperation and systemic injustice, the family's journey mirrors the qualities of pilgrimage. The west is envisioned as the location of material and economic success, and both the journey and arrival are charged with spiritual and communal meaning. Like the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, the Joads journey to the divinely promised land, united by family bonds.

While California is not a pilgrimage site in the religious sense, in the context of recent pilgrimage scholarship,<sup>55</sup> it is a destination of cultural and economic significance. Normative *communitas*, or the transformation of feelings of togetherness into a social system, is felt as the family unites with others on the road, and ideological *communitas*, described by Turner as an emergent model of a perfect society, manifests through the Joad family's eventual commitment to a utopian vision of American society.<sup>56</sup>

*The Grapes of Wrath* adeptly captures the social upheaval of 1930s America, and through a consideration of the Joad family's expedition as an act of pilgrimage, readers can better recognise Steinbeck's push for a more just and equitable society.

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<sup>55</sup> Such as Norman, *Religion, Pilgrimage and Tourism* and Eade and Coleman, *Reframing Pilgrimage*.

<sup>56</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 193-194.