



# Biblical Symbolism in John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath"

*Sirinya Pakditawan*

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Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,2, , language: English, abstract: In 1938 John Steinbeck began writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel which was to gain him his greatest acclaim. This novel is set in the time of the Great Depression and of the Dust Bowl in America. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck tries to expose the hardships and plights of the people dispossessed from their lands during that time. People like the Joads from Oklahoma that were to become exploited migrant workers in California, a place which they thought the Promised Land. Hence, Steinbeck gained the reputation of being a "proletarian writer" because he sides with the common worker. Thus, *The Grapes of Wrath* also belongs to Steinbeck's Labor Trilogy. What is more, his novel was sharply criticized and very much discussed at the time of its publication: "It was publicly banned and burned by citizens, it was debated on national radio hook-ups; but above all, it was read". In spite of all this critique, in 1940 Steinbeck was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for this novel and in 1962 he also won the Noble Prize for Literature. Hence, the *Grapes of Wrath* must be more than simply a piece of propagandistic writing. In point of fact, "Steinbeck patterned the book on far more universal themes, both the biblical story of Exodus, and also humanity's capacity for survival (...) in the face of (...) calamity". It is very interesting that Steinbeck uses biblical parallels in his story. Thus, he alludes to the Old Testament, the Israelites and the Exodus as well as to Christ and the New Testament. In other words, one might also say that Steinbeck takes the reader through the development of the Bible in order to reveal the migrants' developing humanity and religion. This is already suggested by the title of this novel for it is taken from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* by Julia Ward Howe. The fact that Steinbeck's great American novel seems to rely firmly on a

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