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**The depiction of The Great Depression in the works of John Steinbeck
and Erskine Caldwell**

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Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce je věnována tématu světové ekonomické krize a jejího literárního obrazu v dílech Johna Steinbecka a Erskina Caldwell. Teoretická část práce představí kulturně-historickou analýzu daného období a pečlivě prozkoumá příčiny i důsledky období tzv. Great Depression. Díla obou autorů budou zasazena do adekvátního literárního kontextu. V praktické části pak bude následovat literární analýza a srovnání, jak tato témata zpracovává John Steinbeck a Erskine Caldwell ve vybraných dílech.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis deals with the topic of Great Depression in the 1930's America and its portrayal in the works of John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell. The theoretical part introduces the Great Depression, its cause and consequences on the culture and literature. It also briefly introduces Erskine Caldwell and John Steinbeck and both of their works. In the practical part, the depiction of the Great Depression in both works is analysed.

KEYWORDS

Great Depression, literature, Caldwell, Steinbeck, Tobacco Road, The Grapes of Wrath

NÁZEV

Světová ekonomická krize a její vyobrazení v dílech Johna Steinbecka a Erskina Caldwell

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením světové ekonomické krize v 30. letech 20. století v Americe v dílech Johna Steinbecka a Erskina Caldwell. Teoretická část se věnuje historickému kontextu světové krize, co ji přecházelo a také její důsledky. Praktická část se zabývá analýzou vyobrazení této doby v obou uvedených dílech.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Světová ekonomická krize, Caldwell, Steinbeck, literatura, Tabáková Cesta, Hrozny Hněvu

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis focuses on the depiction of the Great Depression in the two novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and *Tobacco Road* by Erskine Caldwell. Both Erskine Caldwell and John Steinbeck were authors portraying the harsh conditions of the Great Depression in the 1930's America, criticising the flaws in economy and politics and depicting the most important events of those times.

The Grapes of Wrath and *Tobacco Road* are fictional novels, set during the Great Depression. Both novels got a fair share of criticism for their raw, uncensored viewpoint. While the labour-class appreciated the portrayal of their struggle by Steinbeck, his vision was a critique of the government, which earned his novel the title of a communist propaganda. On the other hand, Caldwell's work started to be appreciated just recently, as his novel was even banned for violence and other at the time unheard topics. On top of his work being scandalous, it was also taken as a grotesque depiction of farmers in the South, which was not appreciated by the working-class. Fortunately, today the readers are able to read both novels and sink into the time of the Great Depression.

Firstly, the theoretical part establishes the age before 1930's and what led to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, followed by a short summary of the literature of 1920's as it also was an important aspect for the future authors. Furthermore, it explains the economical state of America and the radical steps the government had to take in order to help the ones in need. Lastly, the first chapter describes the Dust Bowl, one of the main topics of one of the novels. It focuses in detail on the migrants of the South and how the conditions they had to live in. The second chapter is dedicated to the literature of the 1930's and the introduction of both authors.

Secondly, the practical part starts with the introduction of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tobacco Road*, establishing their genres, overviews the reception of both books, provides further analysis of the labels, which both novels acquired and compares the two novels with each other. The final chapter focuses on the themes that represent the Great Depression. It demonstrates several topics of the novels, which were distinguishable for the 1930's.

Lastly, the thesis ends with the final conclusion from the given information, about how the authors depicted the Great Depression in their novels.

1. The Great Depression

A time period that is known as one of the biggest economic collapses. Starting with the October 1929 market crash on Wall Street in America. This exact crash sent millions of people into panic and lasted over 10 years just to be finally over with the start of another horrible event in our history – World War II.

First, it is crucial to take a look into what preceded The Great Depression in order to understand the situation as a whole. The economy in the USA was booming before the Great Depression. After the end of the World War I, an era often called as the “Roaring Twenties” took place. As Carlisle states in one of his works, this era is defined by the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz age or the Florida land boom.¹

The economic expert Amadeo discusses in one of her books how the economy in this decade rose by 42% and although in the beginning the unemployment rose too, it slowly settled and after that never overcame 4%. With the rise of economy, higher incomes would be expected but it was quite the opposite. Only the bare minimum of workers would get the average income.² As the economy was seemingly doing great, Americans would start spending their money, taking goods on credit and slowly but surely getting themselves into debts in order to live a luxurious life. They also very enthusiastically poured their money into stocks of companies. As Eric Rauchway states in his book “The production, purchase, and financing of automobiles drove the perception and reality of American prosperity in the 1920s.”³ But as he stated, it was just a perception of certain prosperity, which made the citizens believe their investments into stocks of different companies are going to bear fruits soon after.

This helped to prosper a few industries and one of the biggest was Henry Ford’s automobile company. As stated on BBC’s websites, his series model T car became a symbol of prosperity in the US. Cars were produced faster but also cheaper as their prices dropped to a third by the end of the Roaring Twenties.⁴ A great example of the Roaring Twenties is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s work. His work showcases the beauty but also the worst things that have happened during the

¹ Carlisle Rodney P., *Handbook to Life in America: The Roaring Twenties 1920 to 1929*, (New York: Facts on File 2009), ix

² Kimberly Amadeo “1920s Economy, What Made the Twenties Roar, the balance,” January 03, 2020 <https://www.thebalance.com/roaring-twenties-4060511>

³ Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13

⁴ “The ‘Roaring Twenties’,” BBC, last accessed January 17, 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zsggdxs/revision/1>

“Jazz Age”. Although his works were never really ensured to be autobiographical, most readers suspect that they were somehow influenced by his and his wife’s life. Carlisle also mentions that as the wedded couple lead a luxurious life with money and alcohol, what was not seen in public were their fights and his wife’s Zelda frequent stays at a mental hospital.⁵ As his personal life might have been portrayed in his works, they most definitely became a great example of how people in the 1920’s were perceiving these post-war times and how they dealt with them.

The Lost Generation is also worth of mentioning, as those who reached their adulthood after the First World War fall into this category. Moreover, even Fitzgerald falls under the category of The Lost Generation writers together with writers such as T. S. Elliot, Ernest Hemingway or Gertrude Stein. Katy O’Connor describes how these writers were through the First World War, saw death and no purpose in living. Their works mainly consisted of decadence, big focus on gender roles and idealism.⁶ The Lost Generation is a vital and very prominent category of writers who brought the readers closer to imagine how the life worked during the 1920’s. It is crucial to point out the causes of all these events. Romer mentions that due to the rapidly expanding economy, the consumer spending slowly started to fall until 1929, when the stock prices started increasing at exceptional rate. In response to that the Federal Reserve raised interests in order to stop the stock prices from rising even further. That lead to the decrease of interest in purchases of automobiles etc. followed closely by the reduction of production.⁷ As a result of these factors, The Wall Street fell.

Although, the mentioned above fall was an event that will be remembered as pure chaos and panic, it is often described as the cause of The Great Depression. Lange, in her book *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, focuses on how the Wall Street is often seen as one of the causes but not necessarily as the beginning of the 1930’s also known as The Great Depression.⁸ On October 24, also known as “The Black Thursday” investors went into panic and started to trade their shares on a massive scale. However, the real panic began on October 28, as the market dropped by 12.8%. Another big fall, 12% to be exact, was soon after on October 29.⁹ Lange also states: „16 million shares were traded in the most cataclysmic day in the history of the stock market.

⁵ Carlisle, Rodney P., *Handbook to Life in America: The Roaring Twenties 1920 to 1929*, (New York: Facts on File 2009), 2

⁶ Katy O’Connor, “Lost Generation,” last accessed January 17, 2020
<https://writersinspire.org/content/lost-generation>

⁷ Romer, Christina D. "What Ended the Great Depression?" *The Journal of Economic History* 52 (4): 757-84
www.jstor.org/stable/2123226

⁸ Brenda Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, (New York: Chealse House Publishers 2007), 4

⁹ Brenda Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, (New York: Chealse House Publishers 2007), 3

At the time, the New York Times estimated that between \$8 and \$9 million was lost on Black Tuesday¹⁰. At that moment, thousands of people could see their money disappearing in front of their eyes and with this as the last straw, the Wall Street has officially collapsed. This brought an abrupt end to the Roaring Twenties. The BBC website states that the Gross National Product – an overall amount of goods and services in a country - dropped by nearly 50% and an enormous drop followed even in car production and constructions.¹¹ As a natural instinct, people were scared about a possible loss of their money and as a response, started withdrawing their finances from banks. That led to bankruptcy of several hundreds of companies and banks. Savings of hundreds of people from the middle and upper class were gone. The article on BBC also states how unemployment was increasing region by region, as people lost the possibility to buy products and employees were fired as they were not needed. Homelessness increased as people were not able to afford shelter, directly linked with the spike of deaths due to starvation and lack of nutrition.¹²

The collapse did not only affect America, but also had severe impact worldwide. Rauchway affirms that as America in the beginning of the Roaring Twenties started loaning money to other countries and the banks were forced to recall these loans.¹³ This was also the beginning of an end for trade, as the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act came into play. Albert Hoover was elected in 1929 and his first decision was to deal with the pluming farm economy, proposing a revision of the tariff on imports in order to protect farmers. Willis Hawley, a politician, seeing the opportunity to set the tariffs even higher, did exactly that. Continuing with Reed Smoot, Utah senator, setting the tariffs even higher.¹⁴ All that led to a decline in import from Europe, leaving farmers in drought. As Robinson further explains, the agriculture in the South was already declining, being inferior the agriculture of the rest of the country. The Great Depression threw the farm economy in South into poverty, which escalated the already lasting problems of race and class. People were dying of starvation, most were trying to survive in every possible way, living in anything that provided shelter and scavenged through garbage for food. People were hesitant to ask for charity and even if they asked, the government did not manage to help in their dire need. “The Depression’s unprecedented demands quickly exhausted private charity

¹⁰ Brenda Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, (New York: Chealse House Publishers 2007), 3

¹¹ “The Wall Street Crash 1929,” BBC, last accessed on January 17, 2020
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxhpb82/revision/1>

¹² “The Wall Street Crash, 1929,” BBC, last accessed on January 17, 2020
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxhpb82/revision/1>

¹³ Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 30

¹⁴ “The Senate Passes the Smoot-Hawley Tariff” United States Senate, last accessed on January 17, 2020

sources, and the skeletal welfare apparatuses of local and state governments collapsed almost as rapidly. The multiplying poor could only turn to their national government.”¹⁵ Samuelson further adds that the Hawley-Smoot Tariff act was only used as a scapegoat in order to blame the pre-existing problems in the economy of America. “Debts were written in fixed dollar amounts, and so deflation-falling prices, wages and profits-made it harder for farmers, businesses and households to repay loans. Defaults dumped more land and jobless workers onto the market, causing prices and wages to fall further and worsening the slump. It was a vicious circle.”¹⁶

Franklin Roosevelt was elected into his presidential seat in 1932. During his reign, he implied several programs, also known as New Deal, which were to help the country back on its legs. Lange describes the Works Progress Administration, also known as WPA, which was there to help and hire mainly widows. Another one would be CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps, which intended to put young man to work. Another one of the acts that was put into place was the Agricultural Adjustment Act which offered farmers subsidies in order for them to limit their overproduction of crops.¹⁷ Davis explains the Agricultural Adjustment Act as an act of sudden problem solving, leading to recovery of farms which would consequently promote the overall recovery of the country. This act was one of the few which were accepted without much protests, as farmers and non-farmers hoped for certain benefits. The idea behind the act was that although the prices would rise, the employment and trade will increase too.¹⁸ Hodges further add that acts such as Resettlement Administrations, Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy were put into place in order to raise income on farms and making the southern residents to move to other cities, which were more lucrative. As the financial aid made the region’s economy falter, it started to merge with the economy of the nation. Although there were changes, they were not visible until 1940’s and even those changes did not help the South in becoming better with their economics. Unfortunately, poverty and depression could be found in the South until 1960-1970’s.¹⁹ Another notable project that was created by the New Deal program was the

¹⁵ John L. Robinson, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 3: History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 110-15

www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616551_wilson.20

¹⁶ Samuelson, Robert J. 2012. “Revisiting the Great Depression” *The Wilson Quarterly* 36 (1): 36-43

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41484425>

¹⁷ Brenda Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, (New York: Chealse House Publishers 2007), 9

¹⁸ Davis, Chester C. "The Agricultural Adjustment Act and National Recovery." *Journal of Farm Economics* 18 (2): 229-41

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1231103>

¹⁹ James A. Hodges, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 10: Law and Politics* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 230-32

www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742_ely.82

Federal Writers' Project. As the Library of Congress describes, the project was created in 1935 in order to provide jobs for white-collar workers, one of those being writers. Their initial job was to produce guidebooks about the culture, history and economy of the United States.²⁰ McElvaine further points out the flaws of this program, as the writers had the same stereotypical southern outlook on blacks, which were then presented in the guidebooks.²¹

The website Encyclopedia.com claims that "President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reform legislation was highly similar to the Catholic Church's teaching on social and economic issues"²² They further continue that the churches were concerned about the poverty and other issues which were present during the Great Depression. Different religions saw an increase in believers, as the Great Depression was undermining the hopes of people for brighter future. Religion was an escape from their horrid reality, which surrounded them during the 1930's. Protestantism, which branches into Baptists, Lutheranism, Methodism or Presbyterianism celebrated the biggest increase in their followers. Churches were the once, who were mostly helping the ones in need, they represented unity and possible hope for something better to come. Their services to the community included soup kitchens, temporary shelters and in general the help to the community.

Unfortunately, a lot more was happening behind the scenes. First catastrophic event, that had a serious impact on the economy and was a prominent theme that could be found in a lot of literature of those days, was The Dust Bowl. Trimarchi describes The Dust Bowl as an enormous drought that happened between the years 1931 to 1939 and hit nearly 75% of the United States.²³ In the 1920's the farming was at its peak, as the usage of mechanical farming tools started to rise. That led to overproduction and lowered the prices of products severely. As the farmers began using prairies as fields and left the old fields unused and not anymore usable, it had its consequences. Lassieur describes how by using plains that were not supposed to be used for this purpose, they stripped them from its natural protective grass and left most of the land to corrosion.²⁴

²⁰ "New Deal Programs: Selected Library of Congress Resources", The Library of Congress, last accessed June 26, 2020

accessed June 26, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/fwp.html>

²¹ McElvaine, Robert S., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 3: History 2006*, 194-98 www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616551_wilson.44

²² "Religion 1931-1939," Encyclopedia, last accessed June 26, 2020

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/religion-1931-1939#Introduction>

²³ Maria Trimarchi, What caused the Dust Bowl?, How Stuff Works, accessed on January 17, 2020

<https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/dust-bowl-cause.htm>

²⁴ Allison Lassieur, *The Dust Bowl: An Interactive History Adventure* (Mankato: Capstone Press, 2009), 103

“By 1932, 14 dust storms, known as black blizzards were reported, and in just one year, the number increased to nearly 40.”²⁵ At the time, the rain stopped, and the still possible used soil was blown away by the winds. One of the biggest dust storms was probably on the April 14, also known as Black Sunday, when the amount of dust was so severe, that it covered the sun and put everything into darkness.²⁶ The Balance furthermore specifies, that the most affected of the regions was Midwest, especially Oklahoma:

The Oklahoma panhandle was hit the worst. It also devastated the northern two-thirds of the Texas panhandle. It reached the northeastern part of New Mexico, most of southeastern Colorado, and the western third of Kansas. It covered 100 million acres in an area that was 500 miles by 300 miles.²⁷

The authors of Britannica state that thousands had to leave due to the Dust Bowl. These migrants were mostly called “Okies” (Due to most of the migrants being from Oklahoma) and they had to undertake the travel to California in order to find a job and provide for themselves.²⁸ Regardless of who was at fault or how many were trying to survive by leaving their homes, farmers were losing their livelihoods and income. The former residents of the Great Plains travelled through the Highway 66, which is more known as the “Route 66” to California under the impression of finding jobs in the promised land. As the Library of Congress explains, the California climate was one of the reasons, why the “Okies” travelled there. The logical conclusion is that the climate helps with growing crops, allowing there to be work for thousands. These notions were furthermore endorsed by flyers, which advertised the need for pickers, farmers and all kinds of employees and also promised good wages.²⁹ It is logical that many travelled due to their despair in order to provide for their family, but the promise land was basically the American Dream. Striving for equality during the Great Depression was impossible and many were scammed on their journey to California.

²⁵ Maria Trimarchi, What caused the Dust Bowl?, How Stuff Works, accessed on January 17, 2020
<https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/dust-bowl-cause.htm>

²⁶ “Dust Bowl,” Britannica, last accessed December 12, 2019
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Dust-Bowl>

²⁷ “The Dust Bowl, Its Causes, Impact, With a Timeline and Map,” The Balance, last accessed June 26, 2020
<https://www.thebalance.com/what-was-the-dust-bowl-causes-and-effects-3305689>

²⁸ “Dust Bowl,” Britannica, last accessed June 26, 2020
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Dust-Bowl>

²⁹ “The Migrant Experience,” Library of Congress, last accessed on June 26, 2020
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/articles-and-essays/the-migrant-experience/>

As the authors of the Library of Congress continue, “Okies” were coming from mainly Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Missouri. Their upbringing in the rural South left them with certain prejudice against different beliefs and ethnicities. There was tension from both sides, but the Californian farmers did mostly judge the “Okies”, as they were poorly mannered and were not used to living for example with functioning electricity. That was not the only problem ahead of them. Due to the incredible amount of people migrating towards California, the state could not handle the amount of people coming in. Some had to turn away right at the borders. The lucky ones who got in, had problems getting a job, as the demand was higher than the offer. And even if they did get a job and were able to work, the wages were significantly lower due to the number of employees, so even if the whole family was able to work, they did not earn enough to survive in these conditions. Furthermore, the work was solely seasonal. Meaning that the migrants had to move often to different places in California, in order to fulfil the demand for work in certain parts, where the crop was.³⁰

Migrant camps started to open in order to provide safety and improve public health of the migrants. The LoC states:

The Arvin Migratory Labor Camp was the first federally operated camp opened by the FSA in 1937. The camps were intended to resolve poor sanitation and public health problems, as well as to mitigate the burden placed on state and local infrastructures. The FSA camps also furnished the migrants with a safe space in which to retire from the discrimination that plagued them and in which to practice their culture and rekindle a sense of community.³¹

Farmers were not the only ones affected by the Great Depression. As the crisis was surging upon Americans, they started to feel closer together. Ever so slightly the differences between the classes were being abolished as the unemployment did not leave many people with even the least amount of money to afford shelter and food. Family values were changing also. Many women had to work to provide the basic needs for their family, although there were even laws preventing more than one family member to be employed. Not just that, marriage rates dropped,

³⁰ “The Migrant Experience,” Library of Congress, last accessed on June 26, 2020
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/articles-and-essays/the-migrant-experience/>

³¹ “The Migrant Experience,” Library of Congress, last accessed on June 26, 2020
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/articles-and-essays/the-migrant-experience/>

as couples did not have the resources to spend on unessential expenses such as a wedding.³² What could have been seen as a deterioration of values was a very logical outcome of the crisis which the families and other citizens going through. Other response was turning to religion and God. Within all of this chaos it would be surprising if the authors and literature of the 1930's came out unscathed.

³² Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, (McGraw-Hill Education, 2018) 563

2. Literature in the 1930's

Great names of authors such as John Steinbeck, William Faulkner or Erskine Caldwell came from the 1930's, showcasing that although the country was in a dire crisis, literature was surprisingly flourishing. As Eldridge further explores the path of literature in his book *American Culture in the 1930s*, no one would certainly expect people spending their last savings on reading or theatre. Hundreds of publishing companies going bankrupt showed how in the beginning of the 1930's literature was forgotten. Revenues of the publishers were halved in comparison to 1929. But the authors did not get into depression themselves. On the contrary they started asking questions about the current state of their beloved country and what will the future bring. Focus was also upon despair, hunger, poverty, religion etc. And as the people had nothing to do, literature was a great escape from their reality. In a sense the authors were believing in reviving the society with their works. Magazines were publishing a variety of content from short stories to essays. Exceptional help was also The Communist movement which provided support with the John Reed Clubs – a federation founded to help authors of the time, specifically Marxist authors.³³ Although the Great Depression might seem the most logical main topic of authors in the 1930's, it was not the only notion pulling the authors to write their hearts out on the paper. Eldridge specifies their motivations as “Authors were pulled in various directions at once: political radicalism vs escapism; literary modernism and theatricalism vs realism; region vs nation; man vs nature.”³⁴ Another topic greatly present in the literature of the 1930's, as McElvaine states is racial stereotypes and issues.

Although there were many topics to choose from and for the writers to comment on, certain social issues were more prominent than the others. In the 1930's one could talk about the proletarian literature. Proletarian novel could be defined as a novel coming from the working class, with the issues of the working class which is written for the working class. Works that belong in this category could also be considered uniting. They often have the themes revolution, economy and labour class. As Claude E. Jones mentions in his article *Proletarian Writing and John Steinbeck*, it is often debatable who does and who does not fall into the category of Proletarian writers. Caldwell is in Jones's work mentioned as a writer who is on the edge of

³³ David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 32-33

³⁴ David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 33

this bracket mainly because he used proletariat as a theme in his works.³⁵ Another author would be John Steinbeck.

Being one of the very influential authors, John Steinbeck was most definitely considered a Proletarian writer. He is the author of famous works such as *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* who was born in 1902 in Salinas Valley. A valley which made a huge impact on Steinbeck during his early years and which inspired his novels. He was a son of John Ernst Steinbeck and his mother Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, a teacher, who was probably the one influencing the young boy to enjoy literature. His life also would not be completed without his three sisters.³⁶ His interest in literary writing was strong from a very young age and by the age of 14 he has dedicated himself to writing. As Reef describes in her work, in order to achieve his dreams, he enrolled to Stanford University, where he took courses closely tied to literature and writing. After few years, biology piqued his interest which could be seen in some of his later works. Unfortunately, after six years of studying, although with some breaks, he left the school without a degree.³⁷ Soon after he had several tough years working as a labourer and a journalist. Firstly, he worked in New York in 1926 and after a brief experience there, he moved back California, specifically to Lake Tahoe, where he in 1929 published his first novel *Cup of Gold*. Albeit his tough years of work in California, he had the chance to meet Carol Henning, his soon-to-be wife. They married in 1930 and little later moved to central California. Although he did struggle with writing, it did not stop him from his passion and in 1933 he published his novel *To a God Unknown*, which is closely related to his hometown, where he grew up.³⁸

In the book *Steinbeck and the Great Depression*, Morris Dickstein furthermore explains author's struggles. Several of Steinbeck's short stories, or rather a collection of them called *The Pastures of Heaven*, were accepted by Jonathan Cape and Robert Ballou, Inc. His stories such as *The Red Pony* or *The Long Valley* had their roots in Salinas Valley and showcased the writer's talent. Definitely worth mentioning is his novel *Tortilla Flat*, which was one of his first bigger critically acclaimed successes.³⁹ And as Reef furthermore mentions, in the 1930's he released some of his most famous works such as *Of Mice and Men*, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes*

³⁵ Jones, E. Claude, "Proletarian Writing and John Steinbeck," *The Sewanee Review* 48 (4): 447-448
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27535697>

³⁶ "John Steinbeck Biography," National Steinbeck Center, last accessed January 22, 2020
<https://www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/>

³⁷ Catherine Reef, *John Steinbeck*, (New York: Clarion Books, 1996), 9

³⁸ "John Steinbeck Biography," National Steinbeck Center, last accessed January 22, 2020
<https://www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/>

³⁹ Morris Dickstein, *Steinbeck and the Great Depression*, (South Atlantic Quarterly, 2004) 113

of *Wrath*. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is one of three novels concerning labour issues in the country. Some might consider this novel as one of his best and most critically approved works and the novel *Of Mice and Men* being the most well-known.⁴⁰

After few years Steinbeck became ill and together with that his marriage started to fall apart. He got divorced and in 1943 remarrying Gwedolyn Conger, who carried his first and only two children. During the years of Second World War, he accepted a job in the New York Herald Tribune in order to report about the war. By the end of the war he published *Cannery Row*, a tribute to his friend and also a look into what he has seen during the Great Depression and war. After his second divorce and third marriage, he released a novel *East of Eden*, which is set in the Salinas Valley and basically portrays his family's history.⁴¹ His health unfortunately started to falter and on December 20, 1968 he died.⁴² For his works he was awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature. Publishing over thirty books during his lifetime and achieving to capture the age in breath taking novels which survived the time and are being read even today.

Another notable author of the 1930's is Erskine Caldwell born on December 17, 1903 in Coweta country. The creator behind famous 1930's book *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, which he is the most well known for. As the website Britannica states, he was the son of missionary. He travelled with his Father through many regions, which gave him the opportunity to take in the scenery, behaviours and everything around him.⁴³ With just this much information, it is safe to say that his childhood, parents and his hometown influenced his writing as much as it did Steinbeck. Throughout his works, one can feel the 1930's as if the Great Depression was here and now. In the later years his determination was to be a fiction writer. As New York Times remembers his life, they also talk further about his book *Tobacco Road*, which was published in 1932, closely followed by *God's Little Acre* in 1933. These particular novels made Caldwell into who he is portrayed now, a southern controversial writer, who was not afraid of showing the true face of the rural American South.⁴⁴ Even after all these years he is being praised for his work, which can be seen in an article from Edwin McDowell:

⁴⁰ Catherine Reef, *John Steinbeck*, (New York: Clarion Books, 1996), 10

⁴¹ "John Steinbeck Biography," National Steinbeck Center, accessed on January 22, 2020
<https://www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/>

⁴² "John Steinbeck Biography," National Steinbeck Center, accessed on January 22, 2020
<https://www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/>

⁴³ "Erskine Caldwell," Britannica, last accessed on June 26, 2020
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Erskine-Caldwell>

⁴⁴ Edwin McDowell, "For Erskine Caldwell, 50 Years of Successes," The New York Times, December 1, 1982, 1
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/01/books/for-erskine-caldwell-50-years-of-successes.html>

In the 1930's Mr. Caldwell was hailed as America's premiere proletarian novelist. And a few years ago an admiring Calder Willingham, another Southern novelist, said, "A good case can be made that the inventor of 'Tobacco Road' - far more than William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, or any other Southern writer one can think of - is the true mythmaker of post-bellum Southern literature."⁴⁵

Although now his name is being praised for his works, his beginnings were not as bright. Firstly, as McDowell mentions, he studied at the University of Pennsylvania and Virginia, but he never got his degree, as he rather pursued his career as a writer. He married Helen Lannegan in 1925, had 3 children and soon after got divorced. That led him to settle in Maine, where he dedicated himself to his writing. Before his most successful works he also wrote *The Bastard* (1929), *Poor Fool* (1930) and *American Earth* (1930). After he sold *Tobacco Road*, he officially considered himself a full-fledged full-time writer.⁴⁶

In 1939 he remarried with Margaret Bourke-White, a photographer who he collaborated with on a text-picture book called *You Have Seen Their Faces*. Apart from that, he also reported about the events in Czechoslovakia or Mexico to the American Newspaper Alliance. His new marriage was short-lived. He divorced in 1942 and remarried few months later with June Johnson. One more divorce was awaiting him and in 1957 he married Virginia Fletcher, who was also collaborating with him on illustrations for some of his books. His life brought him back to Georgia. Unfortunately, through several surgeries, Caldwell died at the age of 83, on April 11, 1987.⁴⁷ Although his life was very full and his books were praised wherever he went, it is futile to remember how controversial his books are. E. Caldwell maybe unintentionally brought up to light the unwanted sights of The South, which not everyone appreciated. But it is most definitely safe to say, that his work left a mark on the history of literature and his books will be remembered for many years.

⁴⁵ McDowell, "For Erskine Caldwell, 50 Years of Successes," 1

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/01/books/for-erskine-caldwell-50-years-of-successes.html>

⁴⁶ Edwin McDowell, "Erskine Caldwell, 83, is dead; wrote stark novels of south," The New York Times, April 13, 1987, 1

<https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/13/obituaries/erskine-caldwell-83-is-dead-wrote-stark-novels-of-south.html>

⁴⁷ McDowell, "Erskine Caldwell, 83, is dead; wrote stark novels of south", 1

<https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/13/obituaries/erskine-caldwell-83-is-dead-wrote-stark-novels-of-south.html>

3. Tobacco Road and The Grapes of Wrath

One of the most well-known works of Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, which was published in 1932 is a sociological and naturalist fictional novel by an author, who unfortunately never received the Nobel Prize for literature. The story, characters and overall feeling of *Tobacco Road* is embedded in American minds up until these days. As Lewis Nordan in his foreword to the book itself says, although he has never heard of Caldwell nor he read his fiction, the two words “Tobacco Road” were something that clicked in his mind when it came to the Great Depression literature.⁴⁸ And it is no surprise that Nordan might have been reminded of his childhood. Caldwell is a master of creating the illusion of reality. While reading his works, one can feel submerged in the story. Luckily, people worldwide acknowledged Caldwell’s style. And not just people around the world, but also famous writers, as Korges states in his book “When a writer of a complex, involuted, rich, moving, powerful prose, like Faulkner’s, goes out of his way to praise a lean, spare, direct, plain style, like Caldwell’s, we do well to pay attention.”⁴⁹ As a result of this acknowledgment, the book *Tobacco Road* sold millions of copies, was translated into many languages and was even made into a play, which ran for the record of longest playing on Broadway. The story grasped many people’s hearts and minds.

For *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published in 1939 and became the best-selling book at the same year with half a million copies sold, was one of the reason which brought the Pulitzer Prize for fiction to Steinbeck. His fiction, although a harsh reality, brings certain sentiment towards his characters, as he portrays the struggles of a migrant family coming to California due to Dust Bowl. As Robert McCrum in his article about 100 best novels mentions: “The novel at once became a national sensation, possibly the most reviewed and publicised, and even the most controversial, American novel of the 20th century – discussed on the radio, denounced by angry readers, and even banned in some libraries.”⁵⁰ In the same article McCrum also mentions how *The Grapes of Wrath* were basically the main reason for Steinbeck to be awarded with the Nobel prize for literature in the year 1962. The book also got its movie adaptation in 1940.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lewis Nordan, *Tobacco Road*, (University of Georgia Press Athens, 1995) v-vi

⁴⁹ James Korges, *Erskine Caldwell – American Writers 78: University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 6
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttt0h1>

⁵⁰ Robert McCrum, “The 100 best novels: No 65 – The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (1939),” *The Guardian*, December 15, 2014

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/15/robert-mcCrum-100-best-novels-observer-steinbeck-grapes-wrath>

⁵¹ McCrum, “The 100 best novels: No 65 – The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (1939)”

Although some might point out the similarities in the works of Steinbeck and Caldwell, *The Grapes of Wrath* has a different impact while reading, as it makes the reader feel sympathy for the characters. So, what exactly is different and the same in these works?

Both *Tobacco Road* and *The Grapes of Wrath* novels can be put under several labels. Literary realism as first, fits both novels very well. Slattery would describe literary realism like this:

In literature, realism is reference that give an illusion of exact correspondence with reality in its limited aspects. It is not unlimited, ultimate reality but the fragmented world of quotidian experience that literary realism seems to refer to; or, it may be something felt as borrowed from that kind of experience, for instance, fragmentation or flawedness simply as such⁵²

As both Caldwell and Steinbeck got directly inspired by their upbringing, surroundings and own experiences, the settings of both books are based on real life places and maybe even on real people. In an interview for the Mississippi Quarterly Caldwell was asked if his fiction is based on real-life people and events and his answer was “To an extent, yes. You have to experience an incident in some way, or the germ of it, either by observation or by hearsay, in order to write about it.”⁵³ The same could be said about Steinbeck as it was mentioned already, his upbringing in Salinas Valley and the influence from his parents was very directly tied to his works. As the National Steinbeck Center disclosed on their page:

A strong sense of place is evident in his fiction: “I think I would like to write the story of this whole valley,” he wrote to a friend in 1933, when he was 31 years old, “of all the little towns and all the farms and the ranches in the wilder hills. I can see how I would like to do it so that it would be the valley of the world.”⁵⁴

The realistic view on at the time greatly sensitive topics brought the authors criticism from the public. As Lisca states in his article for PMLA:

The merits of *The Grapes of Wrath* were debated as social documentation rather than fiction. In addition to incurring the disadvantages of its historical position,

⁵² Slattery, Mary Francis, “What is Literary Realism?” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1): 55-62
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/429611>

⁵³ Hoag, Ronald Wesley, Elizabeth Pell Broadwell, “Erskine Caldwell on Southern Realism,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 36 (4): 579-584
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26474951>

⁵⁴ National Steinbeck Center, *John Steinbeck Biography*, accessed on February 2, 2020
<https://www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/>

coming as a kind of climax to the literature of the Great Depression, Steinbeck's novel also suffered from the perennial vulnerability of all social fiction to an attack on its facts and intentions.⁵⁵

Same treatment from the public waited for Caldwell. His works represented the harsh reality that even the farmers of the south did not want to admit being true. Caldwell raised several social issues from the Great Depression which were seen as a raw depiction of the 1930's and the lives of the labourers. As Phillips wrote for the Denver Post:

This 1932 novel about starving Georgia sharecroppers was a sensation when it was first published, and later became a Broadway plays. It was controversial because – oh, the horror – Caldwell wrote about sexuality in the 1930's. But many also thought Caldwell was mocking poor, uneducated Southerners.⁵⁶

Another common label, which both novels have, is the label of social novel. Social novel is a fiction in which social problems are being pointed out. It could be problems of class, race, gender. And as it was already mentioned, Caldwell and Steinbeck did not have any problems with portraying this cold raw truth to the public in their works. Lindberg in his article for *Georgia Review* about the works of Caldwell states “the label acknowledged that his subject matter included much that previous writers had avoided – especially a stark treatment of racial interactions, social mores, and taboos that were usually not openly discussed.”⁵⁷ Although his works were infused with social criticism, his works were often rather seen for the grotesqueness, as for example Gardner states in her book *Reviewing the South* “Many critics considered Caldwell inept at infusing his humorous and bawdy tales with social criticism. Not surprisingly, then, many critics focused instead on Caldwell's use of the grotesque.”⁵⁸ Even Steinbeck did not get away from criticism, as Yuhas claimed in his article for the *Guardian* “It would appeal or annoy any generation, and it's got plenty of flaws – weak characters, flat style, blunt symbolism and melodrama, the list goes on.”⁵⁹ Albeit his criticism towards Steinbeck's work he

⁵⁵ Peter Lisca, “The Grapes of Wrath as Fiction,” *PMLA* 72 (1): 296-309
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/460231>

⁵⁶ Noelle Phillips, “Tobacco Road,” *The Denver Post*, December 27, 2017
<https://www.denverpost.com/2017/12/27/tobacco-road-erskine-caldwell-book-review/>

⁵⁷ Stanley W Lindberg, “The Legacy of Erskine Caldwell,” *The Georgia Review* 66 (3): 459-99
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23268211>

⁵⁸ Sarah Gardner, *Reviewing the South: The Literary Marketplace and the Southern Renaissance, 1920-1941* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 166

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/reviewing-the-south/28B5DFF6E99B0AE1A8BDB7147FE6ACF2>

⁵⁹ Alan Yuhas, “The Grapes of Wrath is 75 year old and more relevant than ever,” *The Guardian*, April 14, 2014
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/14/grapes-of-wrath-75-years-old-more-relevant-than-ever>

continues “Seventy-five years later, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a mirror to a country splintered by inequality, controlled by a minority and facing climate “catastrophe”.”⁶⁰ Steinbeck’s social commentary on regards of the country has had a different impact from Caldwell’s. Both are a mirror into a world of 1930’s, where the less fortunate were being oppressed, ignored and forgotten. But the presentations of those social issues are quite different if one looks closely enough.

Voicing opinions on certain social issues also falls under the category of proletarian writers. As Brown in his book *Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing* specifies, it was a response to the age of Depression the writers were living in. The movement was created behind the idea of a social protest, which was supposed to raise issues of the working class up into the public view. There are in short two categories of writers in this movement. One, which are the authentic proletarians, who come from the working class and are voicing the opinions of their people and “proletarians-by-adoption”, as Brown mentions, are the ones who were interested in the issue but personally were not influenced by the problems of the labour class.⁶¹ So how do the two books fall into the proletarian literature? As for *The Grapes of Wrath*, it depicts the lives of a family of farmers in crisis. Steinbeck tried to picture in his work the problems of economy and politics, but also inevitable events such as the Dust Bowl, which were at the age very much apparent and were mostly affecting the labour class, through a more sensible story, which brought the readers to sympathy. On the contrary Caldwell decided to showcase very similar issues through characters, which might have come out being slightly exaggerated or as it was already mentioned, grotesque.

⁶⁰ Yuhas, “The Grapes of Wrath is 75 year old and more relevant than ever,” April 14, 2014
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/14/grapes-of-wrath-75-years-old-more-relevant-than-ever>

⁶¹ Deming Brown, *Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 56
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183pj7v>

4. The portrayal of The Great Depression in the novels

Apart from being written in the 1930's during the Great Depression, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tobacco Road* depict the age in fairly accurate ways, from the settings and characters to poverty or religion.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish how both authors were aiming to portray their characters and the story as a whole. Although the settings are similar and resembling social issues are being pointed out, each novel leaves a different perception of that age. Steinbeck's visualisation of the South throughout the Great Depression was greatly popular within the working-class readers as the website Britannica mentions. Although the working-class did appreciate the depiction of the struggles, disasters and also flawed government of that time. Regrettably, the government and other businesses labelled his work as "communist propaganda". As Steinbeck proclaimed himself: "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastard who are responsible for this."⁶² The portrayal of Caldwell's characters may seem grotesque, pitiful and one can feel that they are deserving of their own fate. On the other hand, it might be seen as poor farmers being left to their own devices, with little to no help from the government. As McDonald further explains how "Caldwell supports a reading of the family as foolish hicks who have created their own problems, even as he provides sociological evidence of their victimization."⁶³

Secondly, the settings of both novels are important, as they are set during the Great Depression. Steinbeck set *The Grapes of Wrath* in the South, as his characters travel from Oklahoma, Sallisaw, through Texas, Kansas and more to California during the Dust Bowl. Steinbeck describes the settings of the places incredibly, depicting the smallest of details. "Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air: a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and a wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again."⁶⁴ For Caldwell he decided to set his story in Georgia, Augusta near a tobacco road. A rural area which is struck with poverty. His primary focus is on the characters, as the setting is not described in any particular details.

⁶² "The Grapes of Wrath," Britannica, last accessed June 26, 2020
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Grapes-of-Wrath>

⁶³ Robert L. McDonald "Reading Erskine Caldwell: New Essays," Mc Farland and Company, Inc., Publishers 2006

⁶⁴ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: United Kingdom Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), 56

Finally, both Steinbeck and Caldwell focused on places which were not fortunate enough. Due to the harsh conditions of the Great Depression, many were left with little to no money to suffice them for necessities like food or shelter. This was common especially within the working class, as farmers were unable to farm and due to the crash of economy others were losing their jobs day by day.

Tobacco Road and *The Grapes of Wrath* recognizably point out the theme of poverty/hunger and the consequences of the Wallstreet crash. Poverty is clearly obvious right from the start of the *Tobacco Road*, as one of the main characters has the need to steal mare turnips in order to live through another day without starving. Caldwell depicted this distinct part in his novel but did not go deep enough regarding the politics or why are his characters even under these circumstances. At few parts it is mentioned, that the land which was owned for generations by the Lesters was now not theirs but in possession of someone else. Their land was getting slowly but surely bought by an entrepreneur who then did not see any potential income from farming and left the residents on their own with no way of earning for themselves. As a consequence, most farmers would move to Augusta to work in a cotton mill. These mills were organized by the Labour movement in order to give people jobs so they could earn the minimum living wage to survive. But as it was mentioned before, there were protests happening against the government and people refused to accept any help. In the case of this novel, Jeeter is very adamant about staying at his farm due to his family heritage and his nature calling, which was to be a farmer. It is also mentioned, how most of the children of the Lester family, who survived to their adulthood, had a sense of survival and ran away from the Tobacco road to work in a cotton mill. “Maybe it’s all right for some people to do that, but God never meant for me to do it. He put me on the land to start with, and I ain’t leaving it. I’d feel just like a chicken with my head cut off living shut up in a mill all the time.”⁶⁵

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joad family does not do that well either. Their crop has not been successful but if they had not been evicted, they would have probably stayed at their farm. A sense of home is seen in both novels but the Joads realise soon that nothing awaits them back home in Oklahoma. At one point, Grampa throws a fit about not wanting to leave his home and not going to California. He angrily proclaims:

You go right on along. Me—I’m stayin’. I give her a goin’-over all night mos’ly.
This here’s my country. I b’long here. An’ I don’t give a goddamn if they’s oranges

⁶⁵ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Georgia: United States University of Georgia Press, 1995), 68

an' grapes crowdin' a fella outa bed even. I ain't a-goin'. This country ain't no good, but it's my country. No, you all go ahead. I'll just stay right here where I b'long.⁶⁶

Grampa is aware of the droughts and for them being impossible to make money on their land anymore, but he still does not want to leave. The family uses soothing syrup in order to make him fall asleep, so they could put him on a truck and begin their journey. Throughout the novel, although they do struggle with money, they still have something to eat. It does not affect their perception of humanity in any way and are still capable of sharing their food with others. For example, at one of the camps, when the family arrives, Ma starts cooking and is suddenly surrounded by several children from the camp begging for food. She is not fond of giving them food, but she feeds her family first and leaves the leftovers for the children.

An important question is, who was the main culprit behind the poverty and depression for the main characters and who are both authors criticising. From the start of the Great Depression, the whole economy was crashing, putting hundreds of banks in a tough spot. In *Tobacco Road*, the criticism of the government is not as prominent, but it is there. As Jeeter is trying to borrow money to buy all he needs for farming, he gets send away, as the banks do not intend to lend any money. One of the reasons is the amount of people in need of lending money, not being able to then pay back their debt. Once a person ended up taking a loan, the interest was getting high each day, making it useless for the farmers to take upon a debt. The companies at the time were using the situation to get rich or to just simply survive themselves. The characters, as much as people in the 1930's did not understand, that what the government was trying to save the economics of the south by raising taxes. That is tied with the Hawley-Smoot Tariff act, as the taxes were raised several times, the government did not have any possible ways of saving the southerners from the poverty. The plains were slowly left by their owners, with the residents left alone on those properties. Altogether, the only possibility for them would be to move, as it is mentioned in *Tobacco Road*, that the family should leave for Augusta for work. But Jeeter does not want to do that, as he would rather fall into debt or later even starve just to stay on his property. It is pointed out several times throughout the novel that there are positions available for potential workers at the cotton mills. Those were one of the ways of creating jobs to provide for the farmers, who lost their jobs. They were also there in order to stop the farmers from farming and move from the South to other regions or even just cities. Although it proved to not

⁶⁶ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: United Kingdom Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), 205

work with everyone, Jeeter being an example of one of the people, who did not want to collaborate with the government, not wanting to leave his land and his calling. It could be possibly interpreted as his lack of knowledge about the economy of the region and about the struggles that everyone else was going through.

Steinbeck in his novel criticises the acts such as the Resettlement Administration act, which was forcing the farmers to move to other cities for work. Although there were changes happening, Steinbeck was aware that they were no help to the southerners who were fighting for their live every day. Apart criticising the acts that were put into working with the New Deal, he also showcases how the migrants were sometimes not even let into California, and when they were let in, they might not to find a job. Although Joads got into California, they did face the decrease of wages right in front of their eyes. At some camps, they were oppressed by the police due to racism and stereotypes which were held against “Okies”. The police would act upon their own decisions, not following the law, capable of killing innocent people and then blaming someone else or completely disregarding the situation altogether. The novel also shows how the Joads family had to move from camp to camp, city to city in order to follow the seasonal changes of the available jobs, which made it for the migrants even harder. Because of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck was several times accused of writing a “communist propaganda”. As Altnether in his article suggests, Marxism is one of the themes in the novel. The class difference between the main characters and the business owners, police etc. are very visible right from the beginning of the novel. Banks hold most of the land, so they are in charge when it comes to who is going to stay or leave. Same applies with work and wages. The bosses lower the wages, as they are aware of how many workers are in dire need of a job. Another suggested theme is socialism. The Joads come into the Weedpatch camp, which is self-governed, meaning the police cannot come in without a warrant, the migrants choose a leader and divide work between each other.⁶⁷ The Joads through this experience that community of their own and union pays of more than being under the pressure of government and the state.

In a sense, unity was a fairly important aspect in the Great Depression literature. The most interesting is, how Steinbeck and Caldwell were showcasing this in their works. Having two

⁶⁷ “Economic Themes in The Grapes of Wrath: Socialism, Communism and Marxism,” Study.com, last accessed June 26, 2020
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/economic-themes-in-the-grapes-of-wrath-socialism-communism-marxism.html>

families, who have to endure the torture of the depressing times, could lead to different results in how the story unfolds.

At first, starting with the *Tobacco Road*. The Lester family is family only by blood. Their relationship is nowhere near to be called united or even friendly. From the start, Jester, the head of the family, is capable of stealing food from his own son in law, who is bringing that food to his wife, Jesters daughter. Several times in the novel it is mentioned, that the family should stay together, that people in need should help each other or that the rich should give their money to the poor, as it should be a common sense to be united, help each other in crisis and not be forgotten. A certain sense of irony can be felt from the behaviour of the Lester family, as they wish to be helped as they are part of the society and should be treated well, but they themselves are not capable of such sympathy. This is shown on the relationship towards each other as well as to random characters throughout the story. The dynamic of the Lester family is based on greed. The parents, although they do remember some of their children, talk about them only in the relation towards a possible gain of money, food or new clothes. Ada Lester, the mother of seventeen children wished to be buried in a good enough length dress and that often made her remember her children, as they could possibly help their mother out, although she does not even remember them anymore. "I don't know if the others would want to help none or not. It's been such a long time since I saw the rest of them I've just about forgot what they was like. Seems like I can't recall all their names even, sometimes."⁶⁸ In several parts of the story, it is mentioned that Jeeter firmly believed that the others, who did have money and were living by his standards in luxury, would help him and his family by letting them borrow seeds and guano, so they could raise a crop. He believes in the unity of former farmers, who should with his logic help him in his dire need. "But he thought now that if he could get the seed and guano on credit from a man in Fuller, he would not be robbed. The people in Fuller were farmers, just as he was, or as he tried to be, and he did not believe they would cheat him."⁶⁹

On the contrary, with the Joad family, Steinbeck focused on a family, showcasing their tight bond which was tested through their journey. Tom, although convicted of murder, is welcomed with opened arms. Ma, who eventually becomes the driving force for the family to continue on the road, is capable of sympathy for her children and family, but even for complete strangers. The thought of unity starts to arise when Joads meet Wilsons, they offer them to go on the journey for work with them. As Ma said to them, "You won't be no burden. Each'll help each,

⁶⁸ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Georgia: United States University of Georgia Press, 1995), 75

⁶⁹ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Georgia: United States University of Georgia Press, 1995), 116

an' we'll all git to California."⁷⁰ The hunger, poverty and depression has a different impact on the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. By bonding together, the community gets stronger and is capable of protecting itself from the potential death.

Another case of complete ignorance of the characters is when people die. When the preacher Bessie is riding in her new car, with her new husband Dude, he manages to hit a wagon. While all their concerns are on the condition of the car, it is mentioned that the driver was after the crash found by the couple laying under the wagon, with no signs of breathing. "Niggers will get killed. Looks like there ain't no way to stop it."⁷¹, that is how Jeeter perceived this whole situation. At first, this might be taken as a commentary on racism of that age against the people of colour. But very soon it is revealed that it is just the pure showcase of ignorance of the characters as another death soon after occurs. The grandmother is hit by Bessie's car and although the characters notice, they leave her to die, as they only take her as a nuisance, waste of food and space. When later Jeeter comments about the death of his mother, instead of holding a grudge against Bessie for literally causing the death of his own mother, he is mad because the preacher did not let him drive the new car. The idea of Caldwell's unity in *Tobacco Road* is that it is expected, but it is not present. If the children cared, Jeeter and Ada might not have died in the way they did. If the politicians, rich and the ones in charge would care about the working class, they might not have the need to fight for their lives and become as ignorant and selfish to a point, where a death of their own family is seen as a positive event. Another point of view on the Caldwells presentation of this breaking unity is the sole survival instinct. There is no place for unity, when one does not have enough to even provide for himself.

Death also occurs in Steinbeck's novel. Tom does eventually kill a deputy who hit Casy, the ex-preacher, to death. Tom is from the beginning known as short-tempered, which explains why due to the momentarily anger he does not have any boundaries and is capable of murder. But the biggest difference concerning death is how the characters perceive it. As Ma and Pa die during the journey, their deaths are mourned and most definitely unwanted. The family tries to avoid death as much as possible and is aware that in their number and family bond, there is strength. To a point, it could make them seem naïve. Through the whole novel, the theme of collectivism plays an extremely important role. The journey is not just simply about migrating from Oklahoma to California, but it is also a journey to realise, that there is no strength in

⁷⁰ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: United Kingdom Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), 256

⁷¹ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Georgia: United States University of Georgia Press, 1995), 123

individualism, but there is an incredible force behind collectivism. The journey from “I” to “We”.

Apart from unity, the Great Depression would not be called a depression if there was not the depression itself. Particularly despair, depression, sadness and more negative emotions are present in the works of the 1930’s Great Depression authors. This is where Steinbeck and Caldwell part ways in some details. Although both stories are very depressing and are portraying the 1930’s feel, they leave the reader with different emotions at the end of reading.

Firstly, *Tobacco Road* is the novel, which serves the reader pure depression. There is no real hope to be found throughout the novel, as the characters struggle to even simply survive. Although the believe in God is very prominent there, none of the prayers or believes actually come true in the end. From the start, the family is starving, they live day by day with the thought when will they possibly die. Caldwell devoted few pages to a deliberation of the characters about their deaths, specifically about in what they will die. This topic then reappears occasionally, as the possibility of their deaths is still in the air and it might happen at any time. Ada dreams of a perfect dress and Jeeter does not want any rats to get to his casket, so they do not possibly eat parts of him as they did to his father. Nothing goes well for any of the characters, which leaves a very sour taste for the reader. Even when the couple talked so much about their deaths and how for example Ada wanted to be buried in a right length dress, at the end, they end up being burned in their own house.

Secondly, Steinbeck showcased despair and the depression in a different sense. Throughout the whole novel, the characters see a certain hope in possibly finding a job, gaining money and living a normal life again. When the Joad family gets on the road, they live in the dream of California giving them one of the 800 jobs that was offered on the pamphlet. Although, they are told by a stranger at one of their stops that 800 seems a lot, there must have been thousands of the pamphlets and around the same number of potential workers who are as desperate as the Joad family is. Steinbeck again and again brings up the hope of a happy ending which never actually comes. On the road, they slowly but surely lose members, for example Grampa who has to be buried near a makeshift camp and also Granma who dies before the family can get to California. Another hope rises when they can finally get a job, but the wage is getting cut to a minimum, where it would be impossible to survive and the camp is being run down by the deputies, who only cause trouble and do not care about the law. Once the Joads reach the Weedpatch camp, a camp which was one of the federally operated camps, they finally find

peace and can enjoy things they would never think of, like Saturday dances. Yet again, the reader is presented with hope for a good ending, which the characters deserve. But eventually, the family finds itself in a hard position with no work and money again. That situation forces them to go on the road again in order to find a job. And with what did the Joads depressing story started?

Dust Bowl was indeed an incredible force, which did not particularly help the already faltering situation at hand in the 1930's. As significant as it was, it is no surprise in its appearance in at least one of the analysed books. Caldwell does not mention the Dust bowl in *Tobacco Road*, which leaves only Steinbeck, who made it one of the main themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*. As Sheflin furthermore adds "John Steinbeck's treatment of the Dust Bowl in his canonical *The Grapes of Wrath* contributed to the growing awareness among Americans that residents on the Great Plains suffered a particular kind of misery."⁷²

The Joads family is forced to leave their land in Sallisaw, Oklahoma, due to the Dust Bowl. As Barbara Paulsen in her article for The National Geographic mentions:

Sallisaw is too far east to have been affected by the drought that led to the Dust Bowl, and it's doubtful whether Steinbeck himself ever set foot in the town. He wrote about the Joad's journey by consulting a map he'd used on a trip along Route 66 with his first wife, Carol – years before he started writing *The Grapes of Wrath*.⁷³

Steinbeck with this novel draws the inspiration from the travels of "Okies". The story of Joads family is the story of those, who had been evicted from their land and their only hope was to migrate from their homes to California. Due to the Dust Bowl, most people were evicted and fled towards California. They might have not been let in, but in the case of Joads family, they ended up in the Weedpatch camp, one of the camps that was established with the New Deal in order to help out the migrants. Steinbeck also inserted the aspect of the "Okies" being forced to migrate for work even through California. The Dust Bowl is certainly extremely important topic, which drives the whole novel forward.

⁷² Douglas Sheflin, *Legacies of Dust: Land Use and Labor on the Colorado Plains* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019) 1-18

www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfrxftn.5

⁷³ Barbara Paulsen, "On the 'Grapes of Wrath' Trail, the Dust Bowl Still Resonates," *National Geographic*, December 24, 2014

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/12/141229-dust-bowl-grapes-of-wrath-drought-migrants-family-trip/>

Other topics worth mentioning and which are tied with the Great Depression are religion, naivety and hope. All these are represented in both books in different ways. Great Depression could also be felt in the religious spheres and some might even call it the religious depression. Protestantism was very prominent in the 1930's and as Robert T. Handy in his article *The American Religious Depression* mentions:

By the early 1930's, liberals were finding it increasingly difficult, in terms of their optimistic orientation and idealistic heritage, to deal satisfactorily with the realities of depression, the rise of totalitarianism, and the resurgence of barbarism on the world scene.⁷⁴

Starting with *Tobacco Road*, the word "God" is used on nearly every page. Most of the events happening throughout the story, their purpose and cause is blamed on the force from above. Although the preacher Bessie herself claims to not be of any specific religion and says it is the religion of her and her former husband. The blind believe in their god leads the characters to being unaware of their own faults. To a certain extent, it even allows them to excuse the mistakes they do. For example, although Jeeter did steal turnips from Lov, simple prayer from the preacher frees him from all his sins, resulting in no consequences. There is no law except the possibility of being punished for their sins by the god himself. It may seem, as it was already mentioned, that the characters are aware of the political situation in the country, as they feel that the rich are robbing them from their money and property. Unfortunately, even their misfortune caused by people is somehow being the fault of them being sinful. Ada, for example, blames Jeeter for being lazy and not completing the tasks he puts onto himself. All Jeeter says is:

God is aiming to provide for us," he had answered her. "I'm getting ready right now to receive His bounty. I expect It to come most any time now. He won't let us stay here and starve. He'll send us some snuff and rations pretty soon. I been a God-fearing man all my life, and He ain't going to let me suffer no more."⁷⁵

His profound excuses about his behaviour are directly tied with his strong believe in God and fate. In every occasion, the characters find a certain a justification in their religion, keeping themselves blind from the truth and driving themselves to misfortune.

⁷⁴ Handy, Robert T, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," *Church History* 28 (1): 3-16 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3161613>

⁷⁵ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Georgia: United States University of Georgia Press, 1995), 69

On the other side there was Steinbeck, with his hope filled novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Although this novel could barely be called a one with a positive ending, the inevitable sense of hope throughout the Joads family journey leaves even greater disappointment and sympathy at the end. Due to the Dust Bowl, the Joads family have to take off from their farm to California, a land of fortune and hope, where they can most definitely find a job and live happily ever after. Although *Tobacco Road* draws the hope from religion, Steinbeck does provide moments in his novel that are not religion based. Closely related to the aspect of unity in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the characters are quite realistic and create their own hope. A great example of how the story brings hope in the desolate state of the 1930's is the ending of the novel. When the Joads are being flood, Rose of Sharon gets into labour and it is revealed that her baby was stillborn. Not only this fact represents the conditions in which the family had to live in, but it is a horrible event for Rose of Sharon and the family. Due to the flood they flee on a high place, where it is dry. They meet a young boy, sitting next to an older man, who looks like he is close to death. The boy discloses to the family, that his father is starving and needs soup or milk in order to survive. Rose of Sharon offers her breast milk to the man, saving his life. This gesture itself is an amazing example of hope for the future of the family. No matter the conditions they are in, they are willing to give out a helping hand, giving hope to themselves and others, that with helping each other, they can survive these times.

Steinbeck included religion quite immensely in his novel. Both novels have preachers, or at least ex-preachers. In *The Grapes of Wrath* there is Casy, an ex-preacher who could be taken as a Christ-figure. Steinbeck is known for his symbolism in his works. A lot of writers have been wondering if Jim Casy is a symbol of Jesus Christ himself. As Dougherty states in his book "On the one hand there is substantial agreement that Jim Casy is a Christ-figure, and on the other hand there is a distinct sense that he is not adequate to the role."⁷⁶ Casy most definitely does not preach the Christ or his divinity throughout the novel. Dougherty continues:

The resemblances that he notes are: 1) they have the same initials, 2) Jim is preaching a new gospel, 3) Jim went into wilderness to prepare for his mission, 4) Jim assumes the sins of the group, 5) Jim prays for his slayers, 6) Jim is killed.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Dougherty, Charles T., "The Christ-Figure in the Grapes of Wrath," *College English* 24 (3): 224-26
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/373293>

⁷⁷ Dougherty, Charles T., "The Christ-Figure in the Grapes of Wrath," *College English* 24 (3): 224-26
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/373293>.

Apart from Casy, there are other religious symbolisms and meaning throughout this novel. As Shockley suggests “Like the Israelites, the Joads are a homeless and persecuted people. They too flee from oppression, wander through a wilderness of hardships, seeking their own Promised Land. Unlike the Israelites, however, the Joad never find it.”⁷⁸ Rombold claims that the whole novel is completely intertwined with symbolisms from the Bible. He also suggests that “The entire Biblical mythos may be inverted in the novel, from Creation through the journeys of the Old Testament to the figure of Jesus crucified and resurrected to, finally, the religiously expected new era when the judgment of the grapes of wrath is rendered.”⁷⁹ As he continues to further explain, *The Grapes of Wrath* have obvious ties to the Bible and religious symbolisms, although nothing is done by God, who is basically absent throughout the novel and even the characters are aware of that. With the religious imagery Steinbeck tries to emphasise the very needed unity in order to overcome the Great Depression.

⁷⁸ Shockley, Martin, “Christian Symbolism in the Grapes of Wrath,” *College English* 18 (2): 87-90
www.jstor.org/stable/372506

⁷⁹ Rombold, Tamara, “Biblical Inversion in “The Grapes of Wrath,” *College Literature* 14 (2): 146-66
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25111734?seq=1>

Conclusion

This bachelor thesis focused on the depiction of the Great Depression in America during the 1930's in the works of John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell, specifically in their works *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tobacco Road*. The main aim of this thesis was to describe the Great Depression, literature in the 1930's and identify how both authors depicted this age in their novels.

Before the Great Depression began, the “Roaring Twenties” were in full swing, keeping the citizens of America in the American Dream. While the economy was booming and people were spending money, supporting the industries such as automobile companies like Ford, the loans that they needed to take were greater and greater. The literature of the time was also flourishing, as the Lost Generation with the authors such as Fitzgerald or Hemingway. The happiness came to an abrupt halt in 1929, with the Stock Market Crash on Wall Street. Through several days the stocks were falling and millions of dollars were lost during the crash. The Gross National Product dropped by nearly 50%, people started to withdraw money, banks were going bankrupt and unemployment was increasing. At certain point the Hawley-Smoot Tariff act came into play, setting tariffs, which led to the decline of import. That directly impacted farmers, especially in the South. The South was already ridden with poverty and poor economy to begin with, and the Tariff act only made the situation worse. As the government was not able to help, the loans of desperate farmers and businesses kept increasing which resulted in a tremendous unemployment, minimal wages and poverty. The possible resolution of this dire situation was Roosevelt's New Deal, which with several acts was trying to help the unemployment and the recovery of farms in the country. Although the workers were encouraged to move out from the South, where there was at least some work, the South ended up being one of the least economically stable regions until the 1960's. As if there were not enough problems during the beginning of the 1930's, the Dust Bowl made everything worse. The droughts, which were caused by the overproduction and usage of the Great Plains for planting crops, hit mainly the Midwest regions, such as Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas. The southerners, also referred to as “Okies”, as most of them were from Oklahoma, had to flee to California, which at the time was a place advertised as full of jobs with good income. But California was not capable of supporting the number of migrants, having to turn them away at the borders or not being able to pay even minimal wage to support them.

These harsh conditions were reflecting in the literature of the 1930's. Although the depression did affect the writers, there were organizations ready to help them. The topics ranges from racial issues, poverty, economy to stereotypes and so much more. Proletarian literature was widely spread, as it was written usually by working-class writers for the working-class, showcasing and criticising the problems, that the people of that age had. John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell could be also put under the label of Proletarian writers. They both came from the South, were immensely inspired by their upbringing in the South and portrayed these traits in their novels. Although they were criticised for the raw portrayal of the South, nowadays their novels are essential for the history of America.

Both novels are fictional, sociological and naturalistic novels, telling the story of two families living through the Great Depression. Steinbeck depicts the economic issues of that age, as the Joads are evicted from their farm and are forced to travel to California. His representation of his main characters brought many to sympathize with them and feel for their immense despair. The Joads go on the journey with the hope finding a lucrative job, as pickers on fields for example, which will provide them with enough money to not starve. Steinbeck presents the journey of the family as a discovery of unity, the travel from "I" to "we", which could especially be seen on Tom, but also other characters which are then capable of sympathy and of help to others. As they travel on the "Route 66", the reader can see how the government was failing at handling the situation with migrants, as California was not capable of neither admitting the number of people migrating there nor was able to provide them with jobs. Steinbeck went into detail, depicting how even the wages had to be cut to minimum, as the migrants were exploited for work. Apart from unity, he was not afraid of showing death, poverty and depression in his characters and through the whole story. Lastly, Steinbeck included religious symbolisms, which are scattered throughout the story.

Caldwell on the other hand presented the South with a novel, where hope does not exist. His portrayal of the Lester family showcases the pure ignorance, selfishness and misery. The story revolves around a family that lives near a tobacco road and a bigger city named Augusta. The Depression led them to near starvation. They stop caring about each other, they only see others, as for example their grandma, as a nuisance and would rather her be dead. Caldwell puts a lot of weigh on religion, as the characters only hope for a better life is in the hands of their God, who is supposed to protect and provided for them in their crisis. Through the novel, the main characters show no signs of unity or possible sympathy. They have no money to start a crop, but without crop, they cannot get money, except loans, which are only exploiting the farmers,

taking as much interest as possible. Caldwell's characters can seem desperate, cold-blooded and to a point even grotesque.

In conclusion, both authors depicted the novel in their own sense. Caldwell showcased the dark sides of the 1930's with a hopeless story. His portrayal of the Great Depression is quite cruel as he presents the poverty, death, selfishness and depression. Steinbeck with his novel, which is supposed to show the hard lives of the "Okies", evokes sympathy in the reader. He focused on more economic side of the 1930's and the journey which thousands of Southerners had to make in order to survive.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá světovou ekonomickou krizí a jejím vyobrazením v dílech Tabáková Cesta od Erskina Caldwell a Hrozny Hněvu od Johna Steinbecka. První kapitola rozebírá, jak Amerika vypadala před krachem na newyorské burze a jak tato událost následně ovlivnila ekonomiku země. Poté také rozebírá stav, ve které se Amerika nacházela skrze třicátá léta dvacátého století. Druhá kapitola se zabývá literaturou v těchto letech a jak byla ovlivněna světovou ekonomickou krizí. Také představuje autory hlavních děl této práce. Následující kapitola se zaměřuje na samotná díla, jejichž žánr, recepci, do jakých kategorií zapadají a jak se od sebe liší. Poslední kapitola nastiňuje vyobrazení této doby v samotných dílech, rozebírá pohled autorů na tuto dobu a jak se od sebe liší v jistých aspektech vyobrazení té samé doby.

Světovou ekonomickou krizi přecházelo období tzv. „Bouřlivá dvacátá léta“, která přispívala k rozšiřování Amerického snu. Ekonomika Ameriky byla v plném rozkvětu, což vedlo obyvatele k větším investicím, a to až do majetku či do cenných papírů. Závody jako Ford slavily úspěchy a jejich zisky skrz tuto dobu rostly. Literatura se také těšila velkému vzrůstu v podobě Ztracené generace a autorů jako byli Hemingway nebo Fitzgerald. Vše ale dosáhlo svého konce v roce 1929, při krachu na newyorské burze. Hodnota cenných papírů den ode dne klesala a ztráty byly v milionech dolarů. Hrubý národní produkt spadl až o 50 % a lidé začali panikařit. Pomoci měl tzv. Hawley-Smoot celní sazebník, který vedl ke snížení dovozu ze zahraničí. Dalším záchranným prostředkem měl být Nový Úděl, opatření zavedena za vlády Roosevelta. Tento program měl pomoci nezaměstnaným, snížit nezaměstnanost a pomoci farmářství na Jihu země. Tento program bohužel neukázal žádné výsledky v třicátých letech, jeho zavedení se ale projevilo v letech šedesátých. Následným příhoršením, k již tak drastické situaci byl Dust Bowl, neboli prachové bouře, které byly způsobeny intenzivním využíváním Velkých planin k pěstování. Jakmile nezpevněnou půdu roznesly silné větry, prach se dostal až k regionům jako Oklahoma, Colorado nebo Kansas. Díky těmto bouřím se tisíce farmářů muselo odstěhovat z jejich domovů a evakuovat se do blízké Kalifornie. Těmto migrantům se také přezdívalo „Okies“, jelikož většina z nich pocházela z Oklahomy, jednoho z nejvíce zasažených míst. Kalifornie byla v tu dobu pro migranty považována za posvátné místo, kde je možnost najít si práci a uživit se. To ale nebylo pravdou. Stovky migrantů nebyli ani vpuštěni za hranice Kalifornie. Ti, kteří byli vpuštěni, měli potíže najít práci. Vyvolení, kteří práci získali se setkali s realitou ekonomiky té doby. Poptávka silně převažovala nabídku, platy byly menší než životní minimum a práce byla převážně sezónní, takže se „Okies“ museli přesouvat tam, kde je bylo zrovna potřeba.

Všechny tyto podmínky se do jisté míry objevovaly v literatuře 30. let. I přes ekonomickou krizi se objevovala snaha na zachování zábavy a umění v podobě organizací primárně se zaměřujících na finanční výpomoc spisovatelům. Ti se mezitím inspirovali z dění v Americe a psali o tématech jako jsou rasové rozdíly, chudoba, ekonomika nebo stereotypy. Rozšiřovala se proletářská literatura, která byla zaměřena na problémy dělnické třídy a byla psána pro dělnickou třídu. Jako proletáři byli také nazýváni Caldwell společně se Steinbeckem. Oba autoři byli narozeni na Jihu, jejich díla jsou inspirována místy, ve kterých žili, a dokonce jsou do jisté míry jejich knihy napsány na základě skutečných událostí a někteří se domnívají že i podle skutečných osob. I přes prvotní kritiku jejich děl, jsou dnes oba autoři i jejich díla brána za významná, díky jejich vyobrazení americké historie.

A jak vlastně tyto dvě díla ukazují Velkou hospodářskou krizi? Obě díla jsem fiktivní sociologické a naturalistické novely, zaměřující se na příběh dvou rodin žijící právě v této době. Steinbeck se primárně zaměřil na ekonomické problémy státu skrze rodinu Joadů, chudých farmářů, kteří jsou vyhozeni z jejich farmy skrz Dust Bowl. Jejich jedinou možností je vyrazit do Kalifornie za vidinou práce a peněz. Steinbeckovi postavy jsou napsány tak, že čtenář pociťuje jistý soucit s jejich situací, kvůli beznaději a utrpením, kterým si musí projít. Cestou Joadů do Kalifornie Steinbeck poukazuje také na cestu z „já“ k „my“. Jednota a soudržnost byly velice důležité skrz tyto těžké doby a postavy z Hroznů hněvu objeví, že v jednotě je síla a společnou pomocí mohou tyto těžké časy překonat. Rodina cestuje po tzv. „Route 66“ do Kalifornie, aby zjistili, jak chátrá ekonomika i tam. I když jsou vpuštěni přes hranice a získají práci, mzda je tak nízká, že není možné, aby uživili celou rodinu. I přes to rodina neztrácí naději, žene se vpřed a snaží se pomoci ostatním. Naděje je velice přítomna skrze celý příběh. Steinbeck poukazuje na zneužívání naivity a zoufalství migrantů. Ma Joad je hlavním tahem vpřed pro celou rodinu. Dělají vše pro to, aby přežili a dokázali se postarat o sami sebe i ostatní. Dalším důležitým tématem v tomto díle je náboženství. Steinbeck zahrnul Hroznů Hněvu náboženskými symbolismy z Bible. I když je v příběhu bývalý kněz, náboženství není moc zmiňováno skrze celý příběh.

Na druhé straně stojí Caldwell s jeho dílem Tabáková Cesta. Na rozdíl od Steinbecka, Caldwell se rozhodl ukázat více neomalenou, neobroušenou vizi Velké hospodářské krize a Jihu. Rodina Joadů byla plna naděje a soudržnosti, na což Caldwell oponuje rodinou Lesterů. Jeho příběh je protkán bídou a neštěstím a místo toho, aby se čtenář ohlédl na tuto rodinu se soucitem, spíše bude pohoršen jejich chováním. Skrze celý příběh se objevuje téma smrti, zoufalství a hladomoru. Většina postav se obrací na Boha, který má pomoci v jejich nouzi a ušetřit je. Žádný

zázrak se ale nestává. Postavy jsou chladnokrevné, tím Caldwell poukazoval na chybějící soudržnost, které se právě Steinbeck tolik držel. Hlavní postava odmítá opustit svou farmu, na které ani nemůže nic pěstovat, jelikož nemá peníze. Pokud by si vzal půjčku, úroky by převýšily zisk a z utržených peněz by nic nezbylo. Jeeter byl také strůjce svého vlastního štěstí. Mohl jít pracovat, ale jeho volání ho nenechalo opustit farmu. To byl také důvod, proč by čtenář mohl vinit Lesterovi za svou vlastní zkázu. Postavy v Hroznech Hněvu byli také brány jako komické znázornění tehdejších obyvatel Jihu, díky čemuž si Caldwell vysloužil kritiku.

Závěrem je nutné rozlišit, jak oba autoři vyobrazili tu samou dobu ve svých dílech. Caldwell se nebál ukázat to nejhorší v lidech té doby skrze jeho postavy. Ačkoliv se v Tabákové Cestě objevovaly náznaky naděje pro hlavní postavy, nic dobrého na ně ke konci novely nečekalo. Steinbeckovo vyobrazení Velké ekonomické krize bylo bráno jako velice realistické, jelikož se rozhodl vykreslit jeho postavy jako vstřícné a nadějeplné lidi, kteří se museli vypořádat se všemi problémy té doby. Caldwell i Steinbeck ale uspěli ve vyobrazení neskutečných podmínek obyvatel Jihu.

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