Lost People in a Lost Land

The migratory experience in John Steinbeck, Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen

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Introduction

On January 20, 2009, Bruce Springsteen stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and sang the song that in the past has been “sung at VFW halls, protest rallies, schoolhouses, and other events where our nation’s people gather.” (Jackson 15) The occasion was the inauguration of President Barack Obama, for many people a joyous moment. It stands as a sign of Springsteen’s dedication to truth, then, that he did not omit the more protesting verses of the song that are so often left out in order not to offend:1

Was a big high wall there, that tried to stop me
A sign painted said: Private Property,
But on the back side, it didn’t say nothing —
This land was made for you and me.

One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office I saw my people —
As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if
This land was made for you and me. (quoted in Jackson 21)

The song was “This Land is Your Land” by Woody Guthrie. He wrote it as a protest against Irving Berlin’s overly patriotic “God Bless America” (Jackson 22) and it has been the one song that people can immediately identify with Guthrie. Springsteen’s decision to include these relatively negative verses shows that in spite of the positive mood of the occasion, as well as its themes of change, this was not a time to gloss over the mistakes made in the past, but instead to learn from them.

Springsteen has a history with Guthrie. One performance of the famous song was prefaced by him saying: “This is, I guess, the greatest song that’s ever been written about America. It’s by Woody Guthrie and it gets right to the heart of the promise of what our country was supposed to be about. [...] I guess I’d just like to do this for ya tonight, askin’ you to be vigilant, because with countries, just like with people, it’s easy to let the best of yourself slip away.” (Marsh 600) In addition, Springsteen also appears on the album ‘Til We Outnumber Em: Woody Guthrie, with a live performance of

1 Cf. Jackson chapter 1.
“Riding in my Car.” Moreover, as his biographer David Marsh notes, Guthrie was one of the performers Springsteen started listening to when he got more interested in the history of his country and its cultural production. He also read Guthrie’s biography by Joe Klein. (Marsh 276) Although Springsteen’s interest in Guthrie can seem surprising considering their differing musical styles, the above quotation shows that it was not merely Guthrie’s music that spoke to Springsteen; his politics also rang true for him.

Springsteen and Guthrie never met; when Guthrie died in the late 1960s, Springsteen was only just beginning to find his place in music, running around New Jersey with his very first band, The Castiles (Marsh 38) However, John Steinbeck did know Woody quite well personally, having written about him: “Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he has any other name. He is just a voice and a guitar. He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people. […] I think we call this the American Spirit.” (Steinbeck 226) John Steinbeck, author of The Grapes of Wrath, knew Guthrie, and even wrote the foreword for Guthrie’s posthumously published work Hard Hitting Songs for Hard Hit People. (Jackson 257) On his part, Guthrie read Steinbeck’s most famous novel, because he “immediately recognized that it mirrored many of his own thoughts” (Jackson 190). After he had seen the film version, he wrote that it was the “best cussed pitcher I ever seen.” (quoted in Jackson 190) Afterwards, he wrote the two-part song “Tom Joad,” encompassing the entire story in two short songs. Steinbeck is quoted as saying about this feat: “That fuckin’ little bastard! In 17 verses he got the entire story of a thing that took me two years to write!” (Sutcliffe 62) Springsteen, too, saw the film, and was inspired to write his 1995 album The Ghost of Tom Joad. The liner notes specifically mention the film, as well as two Los Angeles Times articles by Sebastian Rotella about the plight of illegal immigrants that clearly influenced two songs on the album.

It is clear enough that these three men are connected, whether through personal acquaintance or musical and political influence. Of more interest, however, is how each author was influenced by the one before him. Guthrie was clearly influenced by The Grapes of Wrath – both the novel and the film. This much is evidenced by his song “Tom Joad.” Steinbeck and Guthrie’s social conscience enabled them to write great stories and songs that incorporated a wide set of themes. Springsteen continues these themes of loss, hope and the sense of community, and, just as Steinbeck and Guthrie, stays true to his characters by contemplating their religion and having them deal with not only the opportunity, but also the oppression of the American Dream. Springsteen’s 1995 album The Ghost of Tom Joad obviously references Steinbeck, but
the exact question that remains is how he incorporated and transformed the themes set forth by the two authors from the 1930s.
1 – History, Themes and a Critical Reading

The three authors discussed in this work all have one important thing in common: an interest in and concern for the “little” man, and how he is influenced by grand occurrences that he has no control over. In order for anyone to understand the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl (both of them having taken place concurrently, during the 1930s), as well as their historical significance, a short overview shall be needed. This overview will serve to give the reader not only a time frame of the works discussed, but also a frame of reference. Next, each author will be given a chance to have his particular attitude in relation to these issues and events heard.

Generally speaking, historians discussing either the Great Depression or the Dust Bowl seem all too keen to treat the two events as separate. (Worster 5) Donald Worster writes:

Coincidence, some might say, that the two traumas should come at the same time. [...] My argument, however, is that there was in fact a close link between the Dust Bowl and the Depression – that the same society produced them both, and for similar reasons. Both events revealed fundamental weaknesses in the traditional culture of America, the one in ecological terms, the other in economic. Both offered a reason, and an opportunity, for substantial reform of that culture. (5)

Because of the connection between the Dust Bowl and the Depression, the two occurrences will be taken as one. Although perhaps not always immediately apparent, Steinbeck’s tale of the Okie experience (as related in his most famous work, The Grapes of Wrath, first published in 1939) shows how families driven off their land due to its lack of use were, in many ways, caught in the dilemma of no land and no work. Similarly, the lyrics on Guthrie’s 1940 album Dust Bowl Ballads give a firsthand account of the individual drifting from place to place, trying to survive on nothing more than wages that were well below what they should be. Finally, Springsteen’s work on the album The Ghost of Tom Joad from 1995, although not contemporary like Steinbeck’s and Guthrie’s, shows his interest in history’s ability to shape an individual or group of people until they have been rendered powerless. As Mike Gilmore of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner wrote, in the 1980s Springsteen started using his music “as a means of looking at history, as a way of understanding how the
lives of the people in his songs had been shaped by the conditions surrounding them, and by forces beyond their control.” (quoted in Cowie and Boehm, 354) In short, whereas Springsteen’s subject is not contemporary to Steinbeck and Guthrie’s, he does draw upon the same set of themes and motifs, thereby asserting that the plight of migrants is not bound by time or place.

**The Dust Bowl and the Great Depression**

Before an analysis of the authors’ works in detail can be made, it is necessary to have a closer look at the historical events that are of significance in this context. The Dust Bowl and the Depression should be seen as events that influenced each other. Yet, in order to be understood, they must first be treated as separate. The Dust Bowl took place in the third decade of the twentieth century, also known as the Dirty Thirties. However, the seeds of this large scale disaster were scattered much earlier, when the first settlers came to the Midwestern plains of the Americas. The cause of the Dust Bowl ultimately came down to a very simple thing: a misunderstanding, willful or otherwise, of the land that the settlers had under their feet. Worster ascribes this misunderstanding to an unwillingness to conform to the needs of the environment, as well as a stubborn adherence to the principles of capitalism, which filled the settlers with the feeling that they had to “tame” the land. Unlike the Native Americans of that region, the settlers did not understand that the terrain they had discovered was living in a delicate and easily disturbed balance. Because of this ignorance, they plowed up the grass whose roots held the top soil together, proudly calling themselves “sodbusters” and feeling in command of the land. However, their ignorance of the fact that the myriad of tall grasses that were omnipresent in the area were in fact the only thing holding the land together caused what has been called one of the greatest natural disasters of all time.

The Dust Bowl area, which covers part of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico, lies in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains. This means that on the whole, the Great Plains get very little rainfall. The farmers and ranchers that first came to the area had knowledge of this and adjusted their practices accordingly. When the rain all but ceased falling in the early thirties, therefore, people were not overly worried. They believed that the rain would come back. However, the lack of rain in

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2 Cf. chapters 4 and 5.
combination with the disappearance of the tall grasses, as well as the sharp and hard winds the Great Plains always endured were the immediate causes for the Dust Bowl. The loose topsoil was picked up by the wind and blown all over the land, forming what came to be known as Black Blizzards. In the first chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck describes the beginning of the dust disaster:

The dust from the roads fluffed up and spread out and fell on the weeds beside the fields, and fell into the fields a little way. Now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. The rain crust broke and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke. [...] The finest dust did not settle back to earth now, but disappeared into the darkening sky. (2)

These blizzards were so powerful that they could turn the day into night as well as bury whole houses. Sometimes the winds would be so powerful that the blizzards reached the East Coast and were blown into the Atlantic.

What did these blizzards mean for the people living on the land? First of all, the land was now of no use to them anymore, as it could no longer be cultivated. Cattle had nothing to eat or drink, and often managed to wander away due to the dust piling up so high against the fences that they could just walk over it. Ultimately, approximately 3.5 million people were forced to leave (Worster 49), because the landowners (almost all of the farmers were tenants) repossessed the land. They became what were known as “exodusters”; the roads west were filled with families who had piled not only themselves but the majority of their possessions onto just one car or small truck. The desolation they left behind made them the perfect targets for exploiters out west who tried to lure them in by promising them work with proper wages, when in fact they were often used as strike breakers, and paid wages that were too low to properly live on. On top of that, the workers were often forced to buy their food and goods at the company store that was set on the property; a store that would have much higher prices than the ones down the road. Ultimately, the Dust Bowl left too many people practically homeless and destitute and left the land empty and unusable for a little over a decade.

The causes of the Great Depression can be summed up quite simply as “an imbalance between production and consumption.” (Nash 15) Industrialization ensured that more could be produced in fewer hours, but the advent of the machines in many
factories also caused, at least temporarily, widespread unemployment. Without a steady income, many workers could hardly afford basic necessities. As a result, many products lay wasting away in factories, which caused the prices to go down drastically. Sixty percent of Americans were living on an annual income that was considered below the minimum amount of 2,000 dollars, while at the same time a much smaller percentage had more money that they knew what to do with. Although one could think that this second group might be responsible for buying the products that the first group could not, this was not the case. The imbalance in wealth distribution also caused a disruption in prices of products.

The Great Depression is aptly named. Not only does it refer to the widespread economic crisis of the 1930s, it also describes the general mood of the American people, especially those on the bottom rung of the ladder. These people, after all, represented the largest group of people affected by the crisis. The fast-spreading unemployment filled working men with a sense of hopelessness: “Americans were gripped by a fear of worse things to come. The economic crisis crushed the human spirit, particularly of the growing number of individuals who lost their livelihood.” (Nash 14) In fact, many people feared that this national disaster was going to be the end of American democracy. Especially the common man, usually the backbone of democracy, was suffering from the events tearing the country apart. Due to the failure of crops on the Great Plains and the very little money farmers could get for the product they did put out, farms all over the region started failing, and since they were mostly tenants, a large percentage of farmers ended up having their land and houses repossessed by the banks. Homeless and jobless, the farmers packed their families and what little possessions they had onto their cars and, lured by the promise of work, set off for California en masse. Once they had arrived, these exodusters found that the promised land of rolling green hills and plentiful jobs was not the Eden they had envisioned, which only further contributed to the general sense of depression and hopelessness.

The Authors and Their Environment

John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968) was born into a middle class family in Salinas, California. His affinity for the working class stemmed from his work experiences before he became a fulltime writer. As a student at Stanford he used to spend his summers working at various places (first and foremost to enable himself to continue
going to university) where he met the working man and was treated to his stories of life and hardships. Although Steinbeck never went so far as to consider himself to be of the same class, he did cultivate a relationship with them in such a way that he was able to translate it into the kind of fiction that portrayed them accurately.

Apart from a real life connection to the working class, Steinbeck was also concerned with the philosophy of communities, specifically group thinking. Ed Ricketts, philosopher, marine biologist and good friend to Steinbeck, introduced him to “an early version of sociobiology that changed his sense of relations between individuals and groups.” (Bercovitch 234) Through late night conversations he made Steinbeck aware of the concept of the phalanx. This is an idea “that holds that groups consisting of individuals are connected to a larger drive or spirit with a separate will and that, functioning as a part of a group, individuals will work to fulfill the will of the larger entity.” (Burkhead 6) This idea is explored in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck also became an adherent of the concept of nonteleological thinking, which eschews the idea that there is an inherent design to everything in nature. For the two friends, who preferred scientific thinking over theological, what was most important was not “what might have been or what could be,” but “a clear observation of what is.” (Burkhead 6) Steinbeck’s affinity with the common man as acquired through his close dealings with them early on in life coupled with his philosophical outlook made him a keen observer; someone fit to describe the plight of the exodusters in the Dirty Thirties. He was always intrigued by the human soul and human motivation, but he became particularly interested in the plight of the migrant workers after visiting a squatters’ camp in Visalia, California: “Steinbeck not only went down into the trenches, as other committed thirties writers did, but grew horrified and helplessly indignant at the migrants’ living conditions […].” (Dickstein 123) *The Grapes of Wrath*, then, is to be seen as Steinbeck’s appeal to everybody who read it to consider these people no longer, as he once did, as “mistreated objects”, but rather as “people trying to preserve their dignity as they struggled to survive.” (idem 124)

That Steinbeck’s novel had an immediate impact is evidenced by the fact that it was turned into a film less than a year after the book was published. The film itself was considered to be revolutionary at the time, since it showed the bleak existence of the lower class people that were affected by the Depression without turning sentimental. Life magazine called Nunnally Johnson “one of the best scenarists in Hollywood.” (85) Condensing Steinbeck’s sweeping tale, Johnson translated the
universal\(^3\) chapters into shorter episodes, sometimes substituting the Joads for the nameless people in them. However, Ford has also been criticized for not properly visualizing Steinbeck’s ambitious tale of the dreary Okie life. Rebecca Pulliam wrote: “As with the Protestant ethic and New Dealism, John Ford à la 1940 stays within certain safe limits of expression and does not assault the confines of its preconceptions any more than penetrates the political organization.” (quoted in Sarris, 92) The film may not hold up to the reputation it had when it just came out, the fact remains that it still stands as a remarkably faithful version of Steinbeck’s novel, notwithstanding the ending and certain loose ends. The ambiguous ending of the novel was changed into a clear-cut message of hope, with Ma Joad giving a speech: “We’re the people that live. They can’t wipe us out; they can’t lick us. We’ll go on forever, Pa, ’cause we’re the people.” (Steinbeck 310) Though Ma certainly gives this speech in the novel as well, it is not at the end and, in fact, not to Pa Joad, but to Tom. Apart from this, there are a few inconsistencies in the film; Noah, who decides to leave the family just after they arrived in California, also disappears in the film, but it is never addressed. The episodes in the government camp and the peach picking farm are reversed in time, and Rose of Sharon never actually delivers her stillborn baby, even though she is seen getting weaker throughout the film.

Whereas Steinbeck was a man who was removed both in place and class from the people directly affected by the Dust Bowl and the Depression, Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Guthrie (1912 – 1967) found himself right in the middle of them. Born in Okemah, Oklahoma, Guthrie did not experience the Dust Bowl in his home state, but in Pampa, Texas, where he lived with his family in the 1930s. Although Guthrie’s parents were from the respectable middle class, “they fell to ruin in the 1920s, suffering an economic decline shared by many others in the rural South and Southwest after World War I.” (Jackson 4) Because of this, Guthrie became intimately acquainted with the kind of life the people in his songs live. Guthrie often sang from a first person perspective, although that does not necessarily mean that all his songs are autobiographical. However, it does indicate that Guthrie felt a sense of belonging to the community of “Dust Bowlers, tenant farmers, and migrant workers who found themselves abused by natural disasters, economic hardships, and social prejudice.” (Jackson 48) Leaving his family behind during the 1930s, Guthrie followed these

\(^3\) *The Grapes of Wrath* is divided into universal and specific chapters. The specific chapters deal with the experiences of the Joad family, while Steinbeck uses the universal ones to create for the reader a general overview of the people in and of the Dust Bowl area.
exodusters and migrant workers on their search for a better life out west, and not only listened to their stories, but often lived the same lives they did. Apart from this, his knowledge of the dust storms and the effect they had on people in the Great Plains and panhandles of the Midwest also comes from a much closer source. The town where Guthrie lived with his family, Pampa, was right in the middle of the Dust Bowl area, and Guthrie was there on Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, when the worst dust storm in the history of the land struck:

It got so dark that you couldn’t see your hand before your face. You couldn’t see anybody in the room. You could turn on an electric light bulb, a good strong electric light bulb in a little room … and [it] would look just about like a cigarette a burning. (quoted in Jackson 52)

These experiences ensured that the voice that Guthrie adopted in his songs, the pronouns I and we, could ring true. Unlike Steinbeck, Guthrie personally experienced the Dust Bowl and the Depression.

If Steinbeck is removed in space from his subject, Springsteen is removed both in space and in time from his subject, at least as far as the Dust Bowl and the Depression are concerned. Springsteen, himself born to a “much less than affluent” (Marsh 23) working class family in Freehold, New Jersey in 1949, never experienced the despair and destitution of the Dirty Thirties. His first few albums then, express no knowledge or affinity with this subject in any way. It was with his 1984 album Born in the USA that he finally started looking at history. This is particularly interesting because this was ten years into his already very successful career. Born in the USA was the first album that made not only his political, but also his humanitarian concerns clear.

Most of his songs taken for this work come from his 1995 album The Ghost of Tom Joad, which immediately connects Springsteen to Steinbeck and show that Springsteen was not only concerned with the actual history of America, but also with its literary legacy. Springsteen was also inspired by John Ford’s film of the novel. In the liner notes to The Ghost of Tom Joad he expresses his gratitude: “Many thanks to the following sources: [...] John Ford’s The Grapes of Wrath, written by Nunnally Johnson, based on the novel by John Steinbeck, a Twentieth Century-Fox film.” In the album’s title song, Springsteen takes Tom Joad’s final speech to his mother and uses it as a promise all men should make to America:
Now Tom said “Mom, wherever there’s a cop beatin’ a guy
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries
Where there’s a fight ‘gainst the blood and hatred in the air
Look for me Mom I’ll be there
Wherever there’s somebody fightin’ for a place to stand
Or decent job or a helpin’ hand
Wherever somebody’s strugglin’ to be free
Look in their eyes Mom you’ll see me.” (Springsteen 26-33)

In fact, this can be seen as Springsteen’s promise to all his listeners, since the last decade has seen him get more and more politically active. This political spirit can also be found in Steinbeck and Guthrie’s work. Similarly, Guthrie is to be seen as the minstrel of his people. Like Springsteen, his popularity ensured him a wide audience, which allowed him to spread the message of the mistreatment of the migrant workers.

Where exactly, then, can be found the source for Springsteen’s interest in the plight of the migrant workers? The Ghost of Tom Joad is primarily concerned with immigrants crossing the river from Mexico, trying to find fortune and happiness in the Southwest of the United States. However, most of them end up unhappy, working for exploitative white people, or worse, dead. The exploitation of migrant workers is also present in the works of Guthrie and Steinbeck, and it seems that Springsteen, familiar with both of them, translates their themes to correspond with his time period. The fact that he has named the album The Ghost of Tom Joad shows the connection he makes between the current plight of the Mexican workers and that of the exodusters.

**The Communist and Commonist Influence**

Steinbeck was inspired to write The Grapes of Wrath after he had been to one of the many squatter’s camps that were located in California. The article he wrote after this visit, “The Harvest Gypsies” details three typical families in such a camp; the people who have just arrived, who still feel hopeful that they will make it; the family that has been on the road and in the camp longer and have already lost one child and a great deal of hope; and the family that has been there the longest, the ones that have a stillborn baby every year, no longer have clothes to put on their bodies or the will to warn their still living children about the dangers of the dirty water. Steinbeck must have looked at these people and realized that there are forces beyond anyone’s control that can turn an ordinary man into something no longer human. He concluded his
article with the following: “And if these men steal, if there is developing among them a suspicion and hatred of well-dressed, satisfied people, the reason is not to be sought in their origin nor in any tendency to weakness in their character.” (82) It is this conviction that can be found throughout *The Grapes of Wrath* as well; the overpowering forces of a divided and unequal society that can only end in struggle. The American capitalist ideal that focuses on the individual rather than the community is a practice that is clearly not to Steinbeck’s liking, as it is the capitalist land owners and banks that are labeled as uncaring and antagonistic, whereas the “simple” tenant farmer with a strong sense of history and community becomes the focus of his sprawling tale.

It is this struggle between the ruling classes and the oppressed masses that is the focus of not just Steinbeck, but also Guthrie and Springsteen. Steinbeck’s tale is in many ways a classic; set against the background of a double historical disaster, he turns one extended family into an example of an entire group, detailing the conflict of classes in a “classless” society. The Joads suffer not only from displacement, but also from alienation, which is what happens when the wage laborer does not own the products he or she had produced and as such is alienated from them and what they present as commodities. This, coupled with reification, when “people’s ‘own activity, [their] own labour becomes something objective and independent of [them]” (Lukacs 85-86) is an all-encompassing representation of the Dust Bowl working class of the 1930s. Similarly, Guthrie sings of the trials and tribulations of the poor working class as it fights against privileged minority that controls them. Though Guthrie did receive a basic education, he had never read Marx. Nevertheless, he had his own ideas about how a society should be structured. A friend of Guthrie’s wrote: “

Woody believed that what is important is the struggle of the working people to win back the earth, which is rightfully theirs. He believed that people should love one another and organize into one big union. That’s the way he saw politics and world affairs.” (quoted in Jackson, 206)

Guthrie himself wrote, in 1941: “To own everything is Common. That’s what the bible says. Common means all of us. This is pure old Commonism.” (quoted in Jackson, 229) Guthrie’s belief system was built on his own Christianity coupled with what can be said to be old-fashioned decency.

The conviction that the earth rightfully belonged to the working people is also expressed by Steinbeck in chapter 5, as an unnamed tenant raves against the land
owner in *The Grapes of Wrath*: “Even if it’s no good, it’s still ours. That’s what makes it ours – being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it.” (35) The songs on *Dust Bowl Ballads* express Guthrie’s exasperation with the inequality that he both witnessed and experienced. In “Dust Bowl Refugee” he complains against the exploitative California land owners: “Just a dust bowl refugee, / From that dust bowl to the peach bowl, / Now that peach fuzz is a-killin’ me.” (2-4) “Goin’ Down The Road Feeling Bad” details his indignation at being treated as less than human, with people ignoring both his own and his family’s needs. In the song, he asserts his right to have “a job at honest pay,” his children’s need for food and proper clothing. Guthrie’s “dust bowl refugee” is angry and frustrated, as he ends every verse with the announcement that “[he] ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.” Not on the same album, yet very representative is the song “Green Back Dollar”: “I don't want your millions, mister. / I don't want your diamond ring. / All I want is the right to live mister. / Give me back my job again.” (1-4) In this song, Guthrie again asserts the right of the working people to the land: “We worked to build this country, mister, / While you enjoyed a life of ease. / You’ve stolen all that we’ve built, mister, / Now our children starve and freeze.” (13-16) The song goes on to tell “mister” that land deeds are meaningless, and that the organization of the “Farmer-Labor party” will ensure that the workers will get their land back.

In “The Ghost of Tom Joad” Springsteen extends us an invitation to “the new world order.” This is of course meant sarcastically, as it has often been expressed that any new world order is generally rather similar to the old one. With this, as well as the very clear reference to Steinbeck’s work of fifty years earlier, Springsteen rather bluntly states that the struggles so intricately described by Steinbeck and sardonically sung by Guthrie are, in fact, not a thing of the past. The focus may have shifted from Okies to Mexicans, but there are still people who experience displacement, as they are forced by economic circumstances to leave their homeland and travel to a place where they are exploited. As they lose their personal identity due to the fact that they are only wanted for their labor power, Springsteen describes the lives they lead, which are by no means any less horrific than those of Steinbeck’s immigrants. Ultimately, though, Springsteen does suggest that the righteous poor will be victorious: “Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag / Waitin’ for when the last shall be first and the first shall be last.” (14-15) This reference to Matthew 19:30 is a message from Springsteen to say that although the poor, who have remained conscientious throughout their ordeal, might not win the fight in this life, they will be the first to get through the
gates to heaven, unlike the ones who are in power on earth. Also of interest is the image of the preacher; possibly modeled after preacher Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath* (Casy has rejoined the “common” people after being unable to unite his faith with his own sexual urges), the preacher in Springsteen’s song is a man like all the others that litter the roadside, searching for a place to belong. The fact that he smokes “a butt” confirms this. Another tenet of Marxist thought can be found in the song “Across the Border.” Although at first the song might seem to be one of endless hope, the fact that it is the only song on the album to do so begs the question of whether this hope is ever to be made into something tangible.

A Marxist interpretation of these authors’ text is plausible, because each author wrote and/or sang about what is considered the inevitable struggle between the two classes occupying society. Steinbeck, in his article “America and Americans: Genus Americanus” claims not only that American society is “in name […] classless, while in practice the class structure is subtle, ever-changing,” but also alludes to the Marxist theory of economic determinism. This theory holds that the base of society, which is made up of “essentially economic in nature” directly influences the superstructure, the “world of mental activities / ideas beliefs, philosophies, and (in the opinion of some but not all Marxists) art and literature.” (Hawthorn 129-130) He does this by describing how the workers, stuck in their menial jobs that causes the aforementioned alienation and reification, must find an outlet by joining certain clubs and groups that allow them, in fact, to act on the fantasy of being like the very people that in the past were responsible for their oppression. On a more detailed level, the theory of economic determinism is applicable to all three authors because they were inspired by real world events: Steinbeck by his visit to the squatters’ camp, Guthrie by his experiences as an exoduster, and Springsteen by the reports of the lives of illegal Mexican immigrants.

On the other hand, it must not be assumed that the authors themselves had any intention of using Marxist theory and ideas to get their message across. Although Steinbeck, in the early thirties, struck up close friendships with people who were members of the Young Communist League, he himself never was a true Communist. (Benson 294) David Minter writes: “Though aligned with the left, he had always worked primarily out of a native tradition of protests, […]. Steinbeck had persisted in drawing on his own sense of history, which was dominated by the nation’s westering impulse, and he often presents ‘the people’ whose stories he tells as history’s heirs. […] In short, Steinbeck wrote out of conflicts as well as about them.” (In Bercovitch 233-234) Added to this is the fact that Steinbeck’s inspiration also came from Ralph Waldo
Emerson and his friend Ricketts. All in all, Steinbeck was wary of the mythology that surrounded communism. He wrote to an acquaintance:

That is the trouble with the damned people of both sides. They postulate either an ideal communist or a thoroughly damnable communist and neither side is willing to suspect that the communist is a human subject to the weaknesses of humans and the greatnesses of humans. (quoted in Benson, 316)

It can therefore be assumed that although there are definitely Marxist overtones to the novel, seeing it as a Marxist work is too simplistic.

Guthrie steadfastly refused to hold to any existing paradigms, whether they were sociological or religious in nature, instead choosing to build his own belief system based on his observations: “Guthrie had pulled elements and ideas from various political and social movements around him to compose his own unique vision of unionism, one which would bring guaranteed land and labor to all Americans, regardless of their creed, color, or sex.” (Jackson 205-6) Among these “political and social movements” were the Socialist Party, which found great support in Guthrie’s native Oklahoma when he was young, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Democratic Party and, on a broader level, the teachings of Christianity. Stephen Michels, in an essay that attempts to trace how Springsteen was influenced by “the philosophers of labor” (17) Marx, Weber and Arendt, concludes that he is “clearly a man of the left, but he is no Marxist.” (28) He reaches this conclusion by asserting that while Springsteen certainly addresses the ongoing class struggles, the struggle that he is actually referring to is between members of the same class rather than different ones. At the same time, Michels states that Springsteen’s views can not be seen as completely Weberian mainly because he is does not adhere to the Protestant adage of exalting work (coupled with the fact that Springsteen’s religious background is Catholic). Lastly, since Springsteen does not seem to make the distinction between work, labor and action like Arendt does, her influence is also discounted. Overall, Steinbeck, Guthrie and Springsteen have each produced works that distinctly echo Marxist thought, yet not one of them can be said to be a card-carrying Marxist.
The Loss of the American Dream

In the 1930s, the concept of the American Dream was a pervasive force in both real life and in literature. Nevertheless, it has always been hard to define the term itself:

“[I]ts definition is virtually taken for granted. It’s as if no one feels compelled to fix the meanings and uses of a term everyone presumably understands [...]” (Cullen 5)

Of course, attempts have been made: The Oxford Companion to English Literature defines it as follows: “the conviction that in America every individual had the opportunity for self-fulfillment regardless of their birth or position.” The inherent promise in this definition makes the American Dream sound like something wonderful. As Cullen describes, however, it has also been looked at “as an opiate that lulls people into ignoring the structural barriers that prevent collective as well as personal advancement.” (Cullen 6) Ultimately, the American Dream is a dichotomy, it being

neither a reassuring verity nor an empty bromide but rather a complex idea with manifold implications that can cut different ways. [...] On the other hand, simply having a dream has sustained, even saved, lives that otherwise might not be deemed worth living.” (Cullen 6-7)

The consensus between Cullen and The Oxford Companion seems to be that, spite of the restrictions imposed upon people by the American Dream, the presence of hope that it inspires is a decidedly good thing. However, it does come with a price: each and every person must take every opportunity presented to him or her, lest he or she misses the chance of a lifetime. As alluded to before, it was this force exerted by the American way of life that was partly responsible for the occurrence of the Dust Bowl. With the promise that anything was possible came the idea that everything that was, in fact, possible also needed to be utilized.

According to Morris Dickstein, the term “American Dream” “was also most sharply questioned” in the 1930s. (xxi) The phrase, which focused on “individual enterprise,” was found to be lacking by many people who had experienced its inherent drawbacks and disillusions. Because of this, Dickstein writes, “[b]y the midthirties an idea of community and interdependence, a fascination with the People, along with a new faith in planning and government” (idem) was replacing the idea of the American individual. Steinbeck was a proponent of the idea of doing away with the individualism of the American Dream and replacing it with a society in which people would work
together towards a common goal, as evidenced by the experiences of the Joads. He also does away with the older theory of social Darwinism, which led people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to believe that the poor had nobody but themselves to blame; if you were poor, it meant you had not worked hard enough.

Springsteen’s ideas concerning the American Dream also seem to— at least partly— denounce its blind promise that so often leads people to risk everything. Greg Smith writes:

Springsteen is actually the working-class rock poet supreme, laying out in uncompromising terms and detail the shattered lives and broken countenances that make up the dark side of American existence as it is experienced by working people for whom the American Dream is a taunting, cruel and ungraspable abstraction. (303)

The characters present in Springsteen’s song all experience some version of this broken American Dream; they either die doing everything they can to procure their freedom, like Louis Rosales from “Sinaloa Cowboys” or the boy Spider trying to make ends meet in “Balboa Park.” Others, like Charlie and the nameless shoe salesman from “Straight Time” and “Highway 29” give in to their darker desires, which for them are the only way to attain the power and self-sufficiency the American Dream promises them. Even when the latter seems to have been achieved, there is always someone who thinks it is undeserved; luckily Billy lets Le Bin Song go in “Galveston Bay,” or he would have ruined more than just one life. It also becomes clear from “The Line” that trying to help other people achieve their American Dream does not mean they will be up front about how they aim to achieve it. The only person that gets to hold on to the hope is the anonymous speaker in “Across the Border.” He, too, knows that often the American Dream promises too much, but is stubborn enough to hold onto it, because “what are we / without hope in our hearts.” (31-32)

Finally, Guthrie has personally experienced the drawbacks of the seemingly great possibilities of his country. In fact, he seems to have realized, in writing the lyrics for his album, that historically, American has never been kind to its citizens: “Hard, it’s always been that way, / Here today and on our way.” (“Dust Bowl Refugee” 9-10) Guthrie’s journeys presented to him the realities of the story of the Joads, and proof that the willingness to work— so important in the realization of the American Dream— was in no way a guarantee for success, as “Green Back Dollar” reiterates.
2 – The Chosen People

The Hope of a Community on the Run

Throughout Steinbeck’s life and friendships with various people, the previously shapeless ideas “about humans and their existence, began to take on definition.” (Burkhead 6) In The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck found an outlet to employ the idea of the phalanx, where the needs of the individual are replaced with those of the community. In the first place, the Joad family is quick to accept Jim Casy as a fellow traveler, even though it means that their car will be heavier than it should be and they will have another mouth to feed:

Ma cleared her throat. “It ain’t kin we? It’s will we?” she said firmly. “As far as ‘kin,’ we can’t do nothin’; not go to California or nothin’; but as far ‘will,’ why, we’ll do what we will. An’ as far as ‘will’—it’s a long time our folks been here and east before, an’ I never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin’ food an’ shelter or a lift on the road to anybody that asked. They’s been mean Joads, but never that mean.” […] “There ain’t room now,” she said. “There ain’t room more’n six, an’ twelve is goin’ sure. One more ain’t gonna hurt; an’ a man, strong an’ healthy, ain’t never no burden.” (111)

Not only does Ma Joad in this passage represent the voice of compassion, she also represents the voice of common sense; even though there is barely room for the whole family on the truck, she recognizes that Casy will be a valuable asset, not just because he is an able-bodied man, but also because he is a preacher. All the bad things that happen to the characters in The Grapes of Wrath practically force them to accept that in times of desperation, individual needs are no longer important, or proper. The mass emigration out of the American Midwest, which Steinbeck so aptly describes, is one of those situations. As thousands of families fled their homeland to search for better opportunities elsewhere, they all found themselves on the same stretch of road, in the same old cars loaded up with all they could carry, and all with very little to eat or drink. Often both the old and the young could not handle the strain of the travelling and fell ill. Early on in the novel Steinbeck shows exactly what could happen in circumstances like these, when he has the Joads receive a blanket from the Wilsons, a couple that they have camped next to, to bury Grampa in. (154) Later on, when it
turns out that Sairy Wilson, the wife, is too ill to travel along, the Joads recognize that they need to help. (163)

Guthrie, although probably not familiar with the concept of the phalanx, could legitimately speak of “we” in his songs, considering he experienced both the Dust Bowl and immigration firsthand. His songs show a political engagement that tries to bring to attention the plight of the common man. Just like Steinbeck, he describes the travels of the exodusters with great detail. However, where Steinbeck had to rely on a feeling of community with the people he wrote about based on friendships and acquaintances, Guthrie could describe his own experiences, as they were practically the same as everybody else’s. While this fact tends to lend slightly more credence to Guthrie’s words than Steinbeck, it does not negate the validity of Steinbeck’s attempts to bring attention to the exodusters.

Steinbeck’s characters go through the transformation of realizing that their individual needs are below those of their group as a whole. This feeling of community was fortified by the fact that everyone on the road to California had the same hopes and dreams; to get to the western state to find a job as a fruit picker. Having left behind the mistreatment by banks and landowners, as well as the barren environment of the Midwest, the exodusters also hoped for better treatment in California. However, as both Steinbeck’s characters and Guthrie would soon find out, they had been lured with false promises. Early on in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad expresses both her hopes and doubts about the opportunities that supposedly await them:

She said, “Tom, I hope things is alright in California.”
He turned and looked at her. “What makes you think they ain’t?” he asked.
“Well – nothing. Seems too nice, kinda. [...] I’m scared of stuff so nice. I ain’t got faith. I’m scared somepin ain’t so nice about it.” (97)

Steinbeck foreshadows the disappointments to come for not only the Joads but all the people who went west, where deceptive landowners were waiting for them, eager to exploit their desperation and have them work for money far below the normal wages or as strike breakers.

Guthrie, too, in his lyrics, expresses hope for better times once he reaches California. Apart from that, as a farmer who has experienced the hardships firsthand, he possesses a remarkable capability for perseverance in the face of disaster:
That old dust storm killed my baby
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me ("Dust Can’t Kill Me" 1-3)

The song goes on to say that everything he had – family, his farm, and his crops – have been either destroyed by one of the numerous dust storms or taken away from him by his landlord. However, no matter how many blows he has to take, he will not lie down.

In both Steinbeck and Guthrie’s works, the people written about are powerless against the various forces they encounter. As described in chapter 1, the convergence of the Great Depression with the dust storms ensured that the people of the Midwest could do nothing but pack up and move out. In preparation for their journey towards an uncertain future, they were forced to leave most of their precious possessions behind. Steinbeck, in his universal chapters, describes these situations aptly:

Now you know well what we can take and what we can’t take. We’ll be camping out – a few pots to cook and wash in, and mattresses and comforts, lantern and buckets, and a piece of canvas. Use that for a tent. This kerosene can. Know what that is? That’s the stove. (95)

Guthrie, in his song “Blowin’ Down the Road (I Ain’t Gonna Be Treated This Way)” draws attention to how the exodusters were treated, both on their way to California and upon their arrival. He takes offense at the term ‘Dust Bowl refugee’ and emphasizes that he wants to work for his money. However, no matter what he claims he is willing to do and that he should be treated like an equal in return, the song starts and ends with the same words:

I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road,
I’m a-blown’ down this old dusty road,
I’m a-blown’ down this old dusty road,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way. (Guthrie 1-4)

Even though he asserts his right to equal treatment, the song ends with Guthrie blowing down the road again, suggesting that no matter how hard he tried, he could not find an employer that would pay him enough to both feed his children and afford proper clothing. This was often the case with the exodusters once they had arrived in California; they drifted from place to place on the promise that they would be paid
properly over the next hill, only to be met by the same exploitative farmers. Guthrie here both draws attention to how unfair the situation is to the exodusters and concedes that there is, for now, no way around it.

The (In)Humanity of Religion

Steinbeck’s novel is full of biblical allusions, some clearer than others. There is, for instance, the overall structure of the novel; it resembles the journey of the Israelites. As mentioned in chapter 1, one of the names given to the people migrating away from the Great Plains in the 1930s was “exodusters”. The journey of the Israelites under Moses is described in the biblical book of Exodus. It is entirely possible that this fact was one of the inspirations for Steinbeck to structure his novel the way he did: “Steinbeck drew on [...] the reverberant rhythms of the King James Bible.” (DeMott xlv) Apart from the structure, there are also instances and characters that remind one of episodes of the bible. Some of these will be discussed in more detail in this section.

First of all, the title of the novel is of significance. Calling the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* was the idea of Steinbeck’s wife, Carol. In his writing journal, he wrote about the brilliance of the idea: “I think that is a wonderful title. [...] [W]ill use it in any way until I am forbidden. The looks of it – marvelous title. The book has being at last.” (65) In a letter to Elizabeth Otis, one of his agents, he further defends the choice: “I like it because it is a march and this book is a kind of march – because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning. And I like it because people know the Battle Hymn who don’t know the Star Spangled Banner.” (171) The phrase, of course, comes from Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The abolitionist song must have resonated with Steinbeck’s original intentions for the novel, which was inspired by real events witnessed by Steinbeck himself. The song starts as follows: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord / he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.” The song in its entirety is a meditation on the magnitude of God and the sacrifices Jesus made to save the human race. It is often seen as quintessentially American, being performed by religious choirs and set to patriotic images of, among other things, the many monuments in the city of Washington, DC.
On the whole, Julia Ward Howe’s song shows a particular type of patriotism that is linked not only to Millenarianism, but also to the concepts of Manifest Destiny and Special Providence. Edward Snyder says:

What Mrs. Howe almost certainly realized during her short period of inspiration was that the central theme of her poem should be *The Day of Jehovah*, as repeatedly and variously set forth in the prophetic books of the Old Testament and as elaborated in the Book of Revelation. Here, she found, was the Hebrew day of vengeance and of purification; a similar day of vengeance and purification, she believed, could and would come to America through the final triumph of the Northern armies – even though ‘Special Providence’ might be needed to bring about such a victory. (233)

Certainly, as said before, this central theme appealed to Steinbeck. Manifest Destiny holds that the American people are a special kind; they have the favor of God in their struggle for freedom. As Howe’s song was originally based on an abolitionist tune, the theme of emancipation here extends to the War of Independence that was fought in the eighteenth century. In this, the Americans believed themselves to be the chosen people. In the bible, it is the Israelites that are chosen. As such, the Joad family’s travels and struggles represent not only those of the biblical chosen people, but also the century long struggle of the American people. Rather than focusing on the biblical definition of “the wicked,” *The Grapes of Wrath* has become a story about human errors that, although they certainly have consequences, are rarely as neatly punished as the wicked in the bible. In fact, it is the remaining Joads at the end of the novel that can be seen as the ones punished, as they are practically washed away by the flood at the camp.

Although the term “grapes of wrath” does not appear in any biblical text, both “grapes” and “wrath” do, as well as “vintage.” “Grapes,” specifically, stand for fertility, as they are often promised to grow (or threatened to wither) or are a result of a good harvest. Of course, grapes also produce wine which, in the New Testament, represents the blood of Christ: “After the same manner also took the cup, which he had supped, saying, This cup is the new Testament in my blood: this do ye, as of as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:25) “Wrath,” together with vengeance, is a

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4 Cf. Jeremiah 8:13: “I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.”
decidedly human trait, which Steinbeck acknowledges, even though in the bible it is generally forbidden and seen as a privilege of God only. Even then, it is to be directed only at ‘the wicked’, which in *The Grapes of Wrath* is of course not always the case; the wrath or vengeance directed toward the Okies is in many ways unfounded in fact and based on fear. The fear that is felt by the Californians can be traced back to what caused the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl in the first place: the (seeming) necessity to make as much money as possible. This fear of losing money to the “intruders” (the Okies) is decidedly human. Finally, “vintage” can refer to both grapes and wine, as well as winepress. If grapes represent the promise of a good harvest, then the destruction of the vintage or winepress, as it happens in Revelations 19:15, represent the punishment that is to be received when initial good behavior deteriorates in spite of the warnings given by God: “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Although God, in the hymn, is destroying “the grapes of wrath,” in the novel, Steinbeck has them grow and grow until they cannot be contained by any force, human or divine: “[A]nd in the eyes of the hungry there is growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.” (385) Dickstein writes: “For him the image of the grapes of wrath was at once apocalyptic and quintessentially American. [...] He sees the grapes as an image of the Edenic plenty of America, controlled by a small plutocracy while the people starve, yet also an omen of biblical vengeance coming to fruition as surely as nature itself.” (129) The “vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored” can be interpreted as the souls of the exodusters. Their destruction at the hands of somebody greater than themselves (either God or the plutocracy that Dickstein writes about), means that any and all hope that the exodusters had upon their arrival in California is taken away from them, until not only their backs but also their souls are broken. If this is to be seen as punishment from a vengeful God (Exodus, after all, comes from the Old Testament), it is because the people of the Great Plains took great care to destroy the land and, albeit not on purpose, made sure that it could not recover from the abuse.

Certain characters in the novel are very clearly based on persons present in the bible. Firstly, the character of Jim Casy is remarkably similar to that of Christ. Stephen Bullivant writes: “[B]oth become disillusioned with contemporary ‘piety,’ fall foul of the authorities, and die a martyr’s death for the supposed advancement of a greater good; and it is a death both might have avoided.” (16) However, Jim Casy is not the
only character of interest with regards to similarities to Christ or other biblical figures; Tom, Ma Joad, Connie and in fact the entire family seem to have come straight out of a biblical story. First of all, there is the family’s name, Joad, which resembles that of Job. And just like Job, the Joads have most of their possessions taken away (1:14 – 1:17) and have to endure the loss of family members (1:19), both to death and the lure of money elsewhere. And, again just like Job, they remain good people, helping others, like the Wilsons, on their way. The biblical saying “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:31) is strongly represented throughout the work; even when the Joads themselves have very little to eat, they will share it with whomever they think needs it, which in this case is practically everyone they meet. Due to the inaction of her husband, Ma Joad is usually the arbiter in these situations.

Tom too, is a character that is interesting; having reformed himself enough to be released on parole after killing a man, he comes home only to find his parents’ farm deserted and in disarray. Nevertheless, he risks breaking his parole, to travel with his family and help them where needed. Throughout the journey, the injustice that he encounters causes Tom to struggle with his more violent impulses. He confesses to his mother that he would have “took a sock at [the] cop” that called the Joad family “Okies” and that he is afraid that “after a while [he] won’t have no decency left” (237 and 310). However, the threat of being incarcerated again leads him to do nothing, until he finally snaps, responding to the violence done to “his” people with a deathblow of his own. Casy’s death by the ‘vigilante man’ that leads Tom to go into hiding also leads him to think about what it was that Casy ultimately believed in; that people have to look out for each other, and that individualism will be the downfall of all. Tom’s hardships as they have coincided with those of his family have turned him into a disciple of the Christ figure that Casy represents, and his vow to be wherever there is struggle shows that he has taken in everything Casy has said over the course of the journey. Even his father recognized Tom’s change: “Here’s Tommy talkin’ like a growed-up man, talkin’ like a preacher almos’.” (253) Tom’s conversion is another obvious biblical reference.

Finally, the character of Noah is another biblical reference. The significance of his name alone needs no further explanation. More interesting is the fact that his decision to leave the family happens just after they have crossed the border into California, and have found a river to wash themselves in. Noah says: “Like to jus’ stay here. Like to lay here forever. Never get hungry an’ never get sad. Lay in the water all life long, lazy as a brood sow in the mud.” (223-224) Later, when he tells Tom he is
leaving, he says that he will live on the river, and eat fish: “Fella can’t starve beside a nice river.” (228) Noah’s apparent affinity for water and his trust in the river to sustain him are a clear echo of the biblical Noah. In both stories, the water acts as a purifying agent; for the Joads, it presents an opportunity to wash themselves completely for the first time in a long time, leading Noah to understand that he must live his life a different way, even if he does not really know why. All he can respond to is the irresistible pull of the water. Whether it saves him or not is unclear, since we never hear from him again. However, the flood that occurs at the end of the novel could suggest that it was Noah who did the right thing, while the rest of the Joads are like the rest of humanity in the bible, getting flushed away by the relentless water.

Guthrie acted as a voice for the people he had met during his travels around the stricken region of the Midwest. Many of the songs on *Dust Bowl Ballads*, therefore, contain some form of plea or address to a higher power. In “Dust Can’t Kill Me,” Guthrie sings of everything he has lost because of the dust storms and the depression. In nine out of the thirteen verses, Guthrie seems to be directly addressing God: “That old dust storm killed my baby, / But it can’t kill me, Lord / And it can’t kill me.” (1-3) Although it does not appear that Guthrie is blaming God for the terrible things that have happened to him (and therefore to almost every other person in the region), he does display a need to tell God that he will persevere: “In his Dust Bowl songs, Guthrie wanted to reproduce [the] people’s stubborn resistance to defeat in the face of one of America’s greatest ecological disasters.” (Jackson 60) Since the disaster caused a renewal of faith among the people of the Midwest, it is logical that Guthrie addresses God in this song to let him know that, whether he created these circumstances or not, the people will always come out on top. The direct address to God is reminiscent of the practice of the Psalmist in the Old Testament. However, the overall structure of the song is more reminiscent of the Book of Job. Where Job remained pious and steadfast in his belief, Guthrie instead remains alive. Not only that, but he remains in solidarity with his fellow exodusters, addressing them as “boys” and reassuring them that if he can survive the trials and tribulations, so can they.

Another song is of interest here: “Goin’ Down The Road Feeling Bad.” Although it was not written by Guthrie, he appropriated it to make it more applicable to the situation of the Dust Bowl refugees. However, the fact that is on this particular album makes it significant for the current discussion. This is because of the second verse:
I’m a-goin’ where the water taste like wine,
I’m a-goin’ where the water taste like wine,
I’m a-goin’ where the water taste like wine, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way. (Guthrie 5-8)

This particular verse is replete with biblical allusions. Of course, the word “wine” can be found throughout the bible. However, certain occurrences are of importance. One of the first finds, for instance, is in Deuteronomy. This is remarkable because apart from the fact that this book refers to wine as a divine gift (7:13), the book on the whole concerns Moses speaking to the chosen people about the long journey they have just suffered through and how they will reach the Promised Land. This, of course, can be seen as a direct reference to the struggles of the exodusters, who, just like the Israelites, had to travel through dust and sand to get to the land of their dreams. Moreover, these lines by Guthrie echo John 2:1-11, where Christ turns the water into wine. It suggests that the so-called Promised Land of Guthrie and the exodusters is not merely a place where they will be able to find jobs and make a decent living, but rather that they believe that the land will be full of miracles for them. The reference to Christ performing what was seen as an unexplainable act of benevolence is telling; the people believe that in these trying times, there has to be a higher power that is looking out for them and will deliver them. Of course, there is also a hint of self-delusion in these lines. After all, Guthrie is not saying that where he is going, the water is wine, or that it will be changed into wine once he gets there. Instead, it will remain water, but due to the hopefully better circumstances it will taste better to him. Then again, it could also be that the water will taste like something arguably better because it is in such short supply in the place he has left behind.

In spite of the fact that Steinbeck’s novel is full of religious allusions and parables, it also portrays religion as something that can lead to dangerous prejudices and misconceptions. When the Joads encounter people who are fervently religious and use this to judge people unfairly, they want nothing to do with them. In fact, it seems as though Steinbeck is trying to say that, ultimately, it is the human and humane side of religion that is most important; the abstract evils as presented in the bible are not to be bothered with. As Casy says: “Here’s me that used to give all my fight against the devil ‘cause I figgered the devil was the enemy. But they’s somepin worse’n the devil got hold a the country, an’ it ain’t gonna let go till it’s chopped loose.” (139) The message here is clear: it is people’s capacity for evil and cruelty that needs to be fought, and not the notion of evil. This is evident in the scene in the Weedpatch
camp, when Rosasharn is accosted by a woman who claims that her baby will be stillborn if she has been “dancin’ an’ clutchin’ an’ a-huggin’.” (342) Even though the woman scares Rosasharn, both the camp manager and Ma Joad tell her that she has nothing to worry about. The fact that Steinbeck acknowledges the humanity of wrath is of interest because it shows that in spite of the many biblical allusions present in his work, he is ultimately more interested in the human condition. This interest in the humanity of religion is also evidenced by the character of Casy; even though he is no longer a preacher, he still delivers prayers for people when asked. These prayers, however, dwell much more on the human condition than the divine one.

Guthrie, too, spends some time on the meaning of religion in trying times. However, while Steinbeck gives an example of religious zealots who are trying to scare people, Guthrie sings of the exploitation that occurs:

Now, the telephone rang, an’ it jumped off the wall,
That was the preacher, a-makin’ his call.
He said, “Kind friend, this may the end;
An’ you got your last chance of salvation of sin!” (So Long, It’s Been Good to Know Yuh, 39-42)

Apparently, preachers in the Dust Bowl area would sometimes milk these natural disasters for personal gain. Jackson writes: “[I]n another version of this verse there can be no doubt when the preacher says in the last line: ‘I’ve got a cut rate on salvation and sin.’ Although unfair to accuse all southwestern preachers of cashing in on the fear the storms aroused, some churches did do a thriving business after the dust clouds hit the southern plains.” (55) The fact that the churches did such a thriving business was due to the fear among people in the Dust Bowl; the threat against their lives and livelihood caused the people to try to strengthen their connection to God, which included going to church more often:

The churches was jammed, and the churches was packed,
An’ that dusty old dust storm blowed so black.
Preacher could not read a word of his text,
An’ he folded his specs, an’ he took up collection,
Said:

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-getting' my home,
And I got to be driftin' along. (Guthrie 42-51)

The irony in the first of these two verses is that the exact thing that is supposed to give the people comfort, namely the word of God, is obscured from the preacher’s eyes; not even he can find the solace the words are supposed to offer and therefore takes his refuge in money and running away. However, as the chorus suggests, even the preacher, with his newly acquired money, will not be able to easily find a new home or place in the world. He, too, is doomed to "be driftin’ along." Of course, the urge of preacher to give in to their more "earthly" desires for wealth is in many ways easy to understand. As Guthrie sings in more than one of his songs, the dust storms threatening the Great Plains caused so much anxiety among people that they thought it was the end of the world: "We thought it was our judgement [sic], we thought it was our doom [...] they though the world had ended, and they thought it was their doom" ("Dust Storm Disaster" 8-10). The people’s fear and their willingness to do anything to save their souls made them an easy target for exploitation.

The Marxist traces in the authors’ work that has been alluded to earlier can also be found to have its expression in Steinbeck and Guthrie’s reflections upon religion. Lobkowicz writes that Marx considered religion to be “the reflection of a wrong world.” (321) In Marx’s eyes, the secular world was the direct producer of religion, as the people who lived in this world had created religion to be able to explain what they did not understand. The creation of God himself by man was “to compensate for and to sublimate his [own] real wretchedness.” (321) More importantly, Marx tied the religious alienation, where “man’s own activities, as though they were operation individually of the individual, ‘operate on man as alien, divine or diabolic activity’” to “economic alienation.” (326) As such, if man were to be able to free himself of this second type of alienation, he would no longer need religion, as the cause for it would no longer exist. Marx believed that, if religion was indeed “the reflection of a wrong world,” then the world had to be made right in order to abolish the need for religion: “The illusory happiness which the religious opiate offers will be replaced by ‘real happiness.’” (327)

The economic alienation, of course, can be found in both Steinbeck and Guthrie. The degrading and repetitive work on the fruit plantations, where the workers are used to either break strikes or simply as the cheapest labor available, causes a kind of stupor where a person could easily forget their humanity. Steinbeck, nevertheless, true to his assertion that the humanity to be found at the basis of religion is of greater
importance than its rules and regulations, maintains the integrity of his characters. Although the belief in something better than the people themselves exists, this “higher power” does not consist of something “alien” but rather, something consisting of nothing but humanity. As Tom says, explaining to his mother what Casy taught him:

Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an’ he foun’ he didn’ have no soul that was his’n. Says he foun’ he jus’ got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain’t no good, cause his little piece of a soul wasn’t no good ‘less it was with the rest, an’ was whole. (462)

Guthrie, however, does seem to hold stock in the opportunities afforded by work, no matter how repetitive the task may be. “Green Back Dollar” equates life with work: “All I want is the right to live mister. / Give me back my job again.” (3-4) On the other hand, the same song does allude to the narrator and his co-workers forming an alliance: “We’ll organize together, mister, / In one big united band, / And with a Farmer-Labor party / We will win our just demands.” (37-40) Although the speech made by Tom Joad does feature in his two-part song based on Steinbeck’s novel, there is no reason to believe that Guthrie ascribed to Marx’s attitude towards religion; Guthrie took offense at the exploitative nature of organized religion, but was positive about personal beliefs and values.
3 – Springsteen’s Ghosts

The Ghosts of John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie

While the previous chapter focused on both Steinbeck and Guthrie, this chapter will focus solely on Springsteen, in particular how the themes and motifs found in Guthrie and Steinbeck are utilized by Springsteen over fifty years later. In a way, this is easy enough; the album, after all, is called *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Thus, the question is not whether Springsteen was inspired by Steinbeck and Guthrie, but how. The fact that all three authors are connected is obvious; both Guthrie and Springsteen echo the speech that Steinbeck had Tom give his mother, almost word for word:

“Then it don’ matter. Then I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where – wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If they’re mad an’ I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when they our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build – why, I’ll be there. See? (Steinbeck, 463)

"Ever’body might be just one big soul,
Well it looks that a-way to me.
Everywhere that you look, in the day or night,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be, Ma,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,
Wherever people ain’t free.
Wherever men are fightin’ for their rights,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be, Ma.
That’s where I’m a-gonna be." (Guthrie, “Tom Joad II” 36-45)

Now Tom said “Mom, wherever there’s a cop beatin’ a guy
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries
Where there’s a fight ‘gainst the blood and hatred in the air
Look for me Mom I’ll be there
Wherever there’s somebody fightin’ for a place to stand
Or decent job or a helpin’ hand
Wherever somebody’s strugglin’ to be free
Look in their eyes Mom you’ll see me.” (Springsteen 26-33)
Springsteen’s choice for his album’s title and its first song send a clear message: although what happened to the Joads took place more than fifty years ago, the same thing is still happening to people. They might not be called Okies or exodusters anymore, but they are people who have left behind a lack of opportunities to try and find them in what they think is the Promised Land. And just like fifty years previous, they are being treated like second class citizens, or worse.

The choice of making “The Ghost of Tom Joad” the first song is significant, too. Part of Springsteen’s message is that the mistreatment of minorities has not let up since the 1940s. By starting with a song that reminds the listener of events passed, he prepares them for what is to come, which is a meditation on the Okies of today. Springsteen’s immigrants are Mexicans (in the majority of the songs, although they are not always the main characters) and one Vietnamese (“Galveston Bay”), and they range from innocent people trying to make a living to beautiful women seducing men into committing crimes. Not only that, but Springsteen presents the problem of immigration from different sides. Whereas Steinbeck and Guthrie mainly focused on the experiences of the immigrants themselves, Springsteen also looks at a shoe salesman and a former soldier turned border patrol agent. Both men are seduced by the simplest of things: something that reminds them of what they have lost.

Springsteen gives the people a voice to tell of the struggles and problems they have to face; not only about the lack of opportunities, but also how hard it is to remain “straight” in these times. In “Straight Time”, Charlie, having just got out of prison, is determined to do the right thing. However, not even his wife trusts him, as she is always “watch[ing] [him] out of the corner of her eye.” (18) With an uncle involved in an illegal auto business and an itching feeling to “go tripping across that thin line,” (7) Charlie ultimately finds himself sawing the barrel off a shotgun. And although the song ends with Charlie unable to “get the smell off [his] hands,” (26) there remains a certainty that he will do it again. The whole story is strongly reminiscent of Tom Joad, who also professes a fear of his own violent streak:

“Yeah, but where we goin’?” Pa spoke for the first time. “That’s what I want ta know.”
“Gonna look for that gov’ment camp,” Tom said. “A fella said they don’ let no deputies in there. Ma – I got to get away from them. I’m scairt I’ll kill one.” (310)
Just as Charlie is ultimately seduced by the promise of riches, Tom also finds himself, however briefly, reverting to the person he was that night in the bar when he killed a man in anger. However, the seduction is different for Tom than it is for Charlie; the latter does not seem to feel he has anything else to offer this world besides his aptitude for criminal behavior, while Tom strikes in supposedly righteous anger: the first man he kills attacked him and stabbed him with a knife (Steinbeck 26), and the second time Tom kills, it is an impulsive act of revenge. As a vigilante man kills Casy, Tom takes his weapon from him and hits him over the head:

“They killed ‘im. Busted his head. I was standin’ there. I went nuts. Grabbed the pick handle.” He looked bleakly back at the night, the darkness, the flashlights, as he spoke. “I - I clubbed a guy.”

Ma’s breath caught in her throat. Pa stiffened. “Kill ‘im?” he asked softly.

“I - don’t know. I was nuts. Tried to.” (431)

Tom does not intend to kill or engage in any criminal acts; the circumstances surrounding him have changed so much that the things that he used to do, which seemed perfectly normal before, have now suddenly become against the law. The difference between Tom and Charlie lies in the fact that Charlie’s criminal acts are premeditated.

Springsteen was inspired by Ford’s film of The Grapes of Wrath. While the themes portrayed in it quite obviously spoke to him, perhaps more interesting is how he deviates from them. As Guterman says: “Springsteen went his inspirations one better by humanizing those of both sides of the line.” (205) In The Grapes of Wrath, the reader only gets the story from one side; that of the “good” guys. Guterman comments: “The film […] shared with Steinbeck’s novel a failure to consider the bad guys in California as anything other than cardboard villains.” (205) In fact, in Ford’s film version, the workers who drive the tractors that will run down the tenants’ houses almost literally have no faces; they wear hats, goggles and protective masks. Interestingly enough, when one of them takes off his mask, he turns out to have a familiar face, as he is a young man who grew up in the neighborhood. Steinbeck, too, does not bother to inform his readers of the names of many characters apart from the Joads. Even the supposed “good” people, like the camp manager in the Weedpatch camp, do not get named beyond their initial designation. In contrast, Springsteen also gives voice to those perceived to be the bad guys. In “The Line,” a soldier, having been discharged and feeling “funny being a civilian again” takes a job as a patrol agent at
the border between Mexico and the United States. He takes his job seriously, and at first it does seem as if he is just another nameless and faceless upholder of the law, so often presented with venom in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

> Well I was good at doin’ what I was told  
> Kept my uniform pressed and clean  
> At night I chased their shadows  
> Through the arroyos and ravines.” (17-20)

No matter what kind of people cross the line, whether they are “drug runners, farmers with their families,” or “young women with little children by their sides,” (21-22) the agent picks them all up. All the same, as the song progresses, it becomes clear that he is more human, and therefore more flawed, than was initially apparent. Not only does he become friends with a fellow agent who is originally from Mexico, but one night, he falls for a young woman that is being held on suspicion of entering the country illegally. Having lost his wife, the woman reminds him “of what [he]’d lost” and he finds himself wanting to help her. Unfortunately, the young woman turns out to be using him; as he is transporting her and her family illegally into the country, he notices that her brother is hiding drugs under his shirt. This song is particularly interesting because it not only humanizes the characters that are so flat in *The Grapes of Wrath*, but also shows a side of the immigrants that Steinbeck never did.

The theme of seduction is one that occurs throughout the album: in the immigrant song “Sinaloa Cowboys,” two brothers cross over into the United States in order to try and make a living, something that is clearly impossible in their native Mexico. Although they have the intention to find manual labor, the pull of making money is too strong, and they soon find themselves cooking methamphetamine. The moment Springsteen starts detailing the risks involved in this job, it becomes evident that the brothers’ lives will not end happily. And indeed, the younger of the two brothers, nineteen, dies when the shack in which drugs are cooked explodes. Of course, money is not the only thing that has the power to seduce men. Just as the border patrol agent fell for the female wiles of an illegal immigrant, so does the ordinary shoe salesman fall for a less than honest woman in “Highway 29.” While no details are given on her legal status, it is clear that the woman’s influence will be detrimental to the main character. Even the salesman knows it: “We made some small talk, that’s where it should have stopped.” As can be expected, the man ends up in trouble; together with the mysterious woman, he robs a bank, after which they flee.
Throughout the song, however, the man himself seems strangely absent. It is as though his entire life has been empty and devoid of pleasure. The woman represents both the pleasure the man’s life has been lacking, as well as a sense of danger that he is drawn to. While in other songs on his album Springsteen clearly states that hope is a precious thing to hold on to, these two songs show the other side of the coin; that hope must not segue into desperation, for that will cause a directly adverse reactions that will only negatively influence the lives of the people involved. Although the Joads are not actually seduced into doing illegal work, they are driven, by their desperation, to take at least one job that has more than one drawback. Not only does it not pay enough for them to live on, but they are being used as strike breakers by the landowners. The connection lies in the message that if something seems or sounds too good to be true, it usually is. This is expressed in the same passage quoted above:

She said, “Tom, I hope things is alright in California.”
He turned and looked at her. “What makes you think they ain’t?” he asked.
“Well-nothing. Seems too nice, kinda. [...] I’m scared of stuff so nice. I ain’t got faith. I’m scared somepin ain’t so nice about it.” (97)

While the Joads’ feeling of hope makes them teeter on the edge of desperation, Springsteen’s characters have solidly tipped over, to their own detriment.

Perhaps the bleakest view on immigrants, illegal or otherwise, is put forward in the song “Balboa Park.” The devastating effects of the kind of desperation also present in Steinbeck and Guthrie’s works are shown through the life of immigrant Spider (he, like others he meets, has no real name: “each one took a name / there was X-man and Cochise / Little Spider his sneakers covered in river mud” 20-22). The impact of the song becomes even greater once it is clear that Springsteen is not singing about adults in this song. It was inspired by a Los Angeles Times article by Sebastian Rotella that put forth the horrible reality of these children:

As young as 9, they wander the streets of Tijuana and Southern California, slipping across the U.S.-Mexico boundary with ease, nomads in the limbo between societies. They move along a trans-border circuit of Border Patrol detention centers, juvenile halls, homeless shelters, cheap hotels, police stations— institutions that they have learned to survive in and to manipulate. (1)
The song’s protagonist is Spider, a young boy who crossed the border illegally. As he is probably an amalgam of the children described in Rotella’s article, his age is difficult to ascertain. He is most likely not much older than sixteen, as the boys that are interviewed range from ages thirteen to sixteen. The article also refers to the practice of adopting “fanciful monikers” as popular. (4) Spider has come north to San Diego as a drug mule, and now finds himself addicted to heroin. Any and all money he makes goes not to finding a place to live, but his addiction and “jeans like the gavachos wear”. In the song, Spider aimlessly drifts through the city, hustling for money here and there (sometimes prostituting himself to wealthy male Angelinos), until finally the border patrol catches up with him. Spider gets hit by a car and barely manages to return to “his blanket underneath the freeway” (1) before it becomes clear that he is going to die. Even though Spider’s background is slightly different from other immigrants on the album – having grown up around hustlers and smugglers in his native town, it would be naïve to think that he had grand dreams of the Promised Land – in many ways, his life is the same; all the characters on Springsteen’s album have things happen to them that are greater than they are, but in the grand scheme of things ultimately mean nothing. There is a hopelessness to it that at the same time can be interpreted as hope, because even though so many lives are lost, people will always keep trying to find a better place.

Nowhere is this persistence and perseverance better found than in the song “Across the Border.” In it, an immigrant sings of everything that will happen to him and his lover once they have made it across the border. It starts out tame enough, but soon evolves into the kind of unhealthy daydreaming some of the Joads were guilty of: “For you I’ll build a house / High up on a grassy hill […] And sweet blossoms fill the air / Pastures of gold and green / Roll down into cool clear waters”. (13-21) Although the kind of hope presented in this song is to be expected, it is almost too good to be true. Steven Michels writes: “The American Dream is alive and well, we must conclude, despite Springsteen’s earlier reflections on it. Were it not, these would be pathetic characters, and Springsteen is not that cruel.” (In Auxier and Anderson 25) Michels’ statement begs the question: why not? After all, practically all of the protagonists in Springsteen’s songs on this album end up defeated in some way.6 It would be inconsistent of Springsteen to intimate that while thousands of other

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5 Slang for “foreigner.” It is usually meant in an insulting manner. Generally spelled “gabachos.” It is not clear whether the misspelling was a deliberate act on Springsteen’s part.
6 The exception would be Le Bin Song from “Galveston Bay”, who manages to survive the American Dream by tempering his desires.
immigrants, despite their hard work, eventually have to go back home or die, these two people will be able to make it. Springsteen is trying to say here that the American Dream is exactly that: a dream. He does not necessarily condemn that dream, but does warn against its devastating effects. Ultimately, however, he has his immigrant realize that what he is dreaming about is unlikely to ever come true. But instead of resigning himself to this fact, the immigrant is much more positive: “For what are we / Without hope in our hearts.” (31-32) Springsteen, and therefore the character in this song, have realized that while a certain sense of reality is most helpful in reigning in the more harmful desires that have caused others on the album to be left alone or even die, to let go of hope is to die a metaphorical death. The same can be said for Steinbeck, if one looks at the end of his novel. Many critics and readers have argued over whether or not the final image of the novel sends a hopeful message, when in actuality, it can be seen as both hopeful and hopeless. Although it is unlikely that the Joad family will stay together for very long, much less survive, the hope that Steinbeck had for humanity is represented by Rosasharn’s act of compassion. In this sense, the terms hope and perseverance can be seen as having the same meaning, and perseverance of hope is what makes people great, according to both Springsteen and Steinbeck.

The Ghosts of the Chosen, the Reviled and the Believers

Steinbeck believed in the theory of the phalanx, or a communal soul, that connected all the people in his work and enabled them to recognize that the individual took a backseat to the greater good. Similarly, Guthrie’s songs are mainly concerned with people that are all in the same situation and as such form a community. If this somewhat one-sided view is not perpetuated by Springsteen, where can be found the sense of community that must be present on the album if it is to be connected to the other two authors? Again, the answer lies in the first song on the album. Tom Joad’s rousing speech to his mother, echoed by Springsteen, serves as a lead-in to the rest of the album, not only retaining its function as a frame for the themes and subject that are to follow, but also forms an introduction to the different characters present in the subsequent songs. The listener gets to hear not only about the man that is being beaten by a cop, but also about the reasons the cop has for beating him (in “The Line”). Not just the poor immigrants’ “hungry newborn baby[’s] cries” get to be heard, but also that of a parolee struggling with his more violent impulses (“Straight Time”). The “fight ’gainst the blood and hatred in the air” takes on different dimensions as it
is both about Americans struggling against their underpaying bosses ("Youngstown") and self-righteous Americans recognizing that not all immigrants are bad people ("Galveston Bay"). Anybody that is "fightin’ for a place to stand" gets a chance to have his or her story heard, whether it is the aforementioned parolee or illegal Mexican immigrants resorting to cooking methamphetamine just to make enough money ("Sinaloa Cowboys"). In "Galveston Bay," the character of Le Bin Song is simply doing "a decent job" and very few people on the album are looking for a handout as they search for "a helpin’ hand". Finally, Springsteen sings for everybody "strugglin’ to be free". Although he has criticized his country ever since his "Born in the USA" was widely misinterpreted, it seems that Springsteen still believes in the inalienable right to freedom, no matter what a person has done in his or her past. He might condemn their methods, but never their intentions. In this sense, the people on Springsteen’s album are all filled with the ghost of Tom Joad, and they all have Springsteen’s assurance that they will be supported.

When one looks at Springsteen’s oeuvre as a whole, the idea that he was not overly religious is easily formed. On a 1998 compilation album, Springsteen incorporates the song “Part Man, Part Monkey.” Most telling are the last two lines: “Tell them soul-suckin’ preachers to come down and see / Part man, part monkey, baby that’s me.” (21-22) During a live performance, Springsteen said as a lead-in to this song: “Well they had this tv movie on about a month ago. It was with uh, I think Jason Robards, Kirk Douglas... And they put this guy on trial... Well lemme tell you about it.” This film is most likely Inherit the Wind (the 1988 television version, rather than the original 1960 one, which starred Spencer Tracy), which was based on the Scopes Monkey trial. However, it must not be assumed that Springsteen is in any way anti-religious. Rather, this song suggests that, like Steinbeck, Springsteen disapproves of the more exploitative sides of religion. As such, and because it fits with his characters, it is a theme of The Ghost of Tom Joad.

Again it is the first song – which can be seen as the frame of the rest of the album – that makes mention of a biblical text: “Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag / Waitin’ for when the last shall be first and the first shall be last.” (14-15) This last line is from Matthew 19:30. The chapter in its entirety shows how a clash with the Pharisees leads Jesus to give instructions to his disciples on how to live their lives to ensure entrance into heaven. In 19:30, the Pharisees challenge Jesus by asking him if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. After he has explained why this is unlawful and has healed several children, one of his disciples comes up to ask him what type
life he must lead to get into heaven. When Jesus tells him that he, aside from all the
good deeds that he has already done, must sell all of his possessions, the man
disappointedly walks away, but Jesus continues to explain to the remaining disciples
that which makes Springsteen’s use of the last verse all the more interesting; that the
rich man will have trouble getting into heaven: “And again I say unto you, It is easier
for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the
kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:24) Ultimately, it is those who have forsaken everything
and have followed Jesus that will be saved, rather than those in possession of worldly
goods. What Jesus refers to in his last line is that while the rich men might deem
themselves to be “the first,” or the most important people in this world and the poor
the last, it is those poor, having forsaken everything, that will get preference once the
time is right. Springsteen is saying that the poor, always outnumbering the rich and in
control, are more important than the individual rich man.

The image of the preacher presented by Springsteen in this song is also striking;
he has joined the rest of the people in their struggle for freedom. This human image
of a person that is often seen as being closer to God than the average human being
correlates to Steinbeck’s preference for the human side of religion. The social
significance of Springsteen’s inclusion of this last line of the chapter is much more
interesting than the religious one. Even though Springsteen was raised a Catholic and
attended parish schools, his religion is relegated to a tool, one that Springsteen uses to
get his social and political message across. The theme of religion functions as a lesson
in morality. Jeffrey Symynkywicz writes:

> It is in how we meet the unmet needs of these downtrodden men and women
> that we will be judged. In the spirit of the Gospel of Matthew, Springsteen
> reminds us that it is in assisting these, the least of our brothers and sisters, that
> we truly honor the God who is within us. (123-124)

Although this interpretation puts too much weight on Springsteen’s commitment to
religion, the next passage does seem to describe Springsteen’s intentions more
accurately: “To prove our worth – as individuals and as a nation – we, like Joad, must
declare our oneness with the dispossessed, from the youngest to the oldest, with all
those ‘strugglin’ to be free.’” (124)

However, Springsteen also uses references to religion for another purpose: in
“Across the Border” the narrator expresses hope that “the saints’ blessing” will be on
his side once he gets to America. Again, America is seen as the quintessential
Promised Land, where the narrator and his lover will “drink from God’s blessed waters / and eat the fruit from the vine.” (33-34) Rather than addressing the moral or the human side of religion, Springsteen uses it in this song to properly flesh out his characters. Since the narrator is Mexican, it is reasonable to assume that he is also a catholic. By having his narrator call upon the saints and expressing a desire to go to the Promised Land, Springsteen is making sure that the character rings true. It is this attention to detail that is also present in Steinbeck and Guthrie; Steinbeck investigated his subject rigorously in order to make sure the characters in his work were convincing, and Guthrie knew firsthand what the experience felt like.
Conclusion

It has become clear that all three authors discussed share a common theme in their works. They share a concern for the less advantaged, are critical of religion and its exploitative practices (but use it as a narrative tool) and all channeled what they saw, read or experienced into their art. But where Steinbeck focused on the People’s need to band together, Springsteen, writing in the nineties, has long forgotten that sense of togetherness – and the American people have done so with him. The American Dream is one of individualism; not “group-man” or “commonism,” but rather the responsibility of one man to do what he can to succeed. As such, it is no one’s fault but his own when he fails. In the thirties, “we had obligations to each other, and especially to the less fortunate among us,” (Dickstein xxi) but in Springsteen’s nineties, the state barely having recovered from another economic scare in the late eighties, individualism was back in full form.

Nevertheless, Springsteen was just as inspired by real-life events as Steinbeck and Guthrie were. Like them, reading about the people’s woes and seeing them with his own eyes made him realize that they were in desperate need of a voice; desperate for someone who, unlike themselves, could reach a bigger audience and make people pay attention. Guthrie was there with the people, and Springsteen is there for the people; and thanks to modern media, Springsteen has the ability to reach a wider audience than Steinbeck or Guthrie ever did. Nevertheless, all three authors can be credited to have the same intention; to inform people about the injustices occurring around them, in the hopes that they can inspire them to right the wrongs somehow. In order to also make political leaders aware of the situation, Springsteen cleverly employs themes that have been around for at least a century, themes that have been used by famous people before. By doing this, he ensures that by making people remember their country’s history, they will think twice about repeating its mistakes.

As shown, the themes of community, fleeing from oppression, the quest for freedom and the hope that remains, as well as that of religion and the stifling opportunities presented by the American Dream, are present in all three authors discussed. Their politics, all similar enough to be properly compared, are all not quite Marxist, but certainly leftist enough to have aroused suspicions. The works of Steinbeck and Guthrie have left their mark on Springsteen’s thinking as well as his work and as such, have been preserved for a future audience. Even though they have been altered by the changing philosophies of the second half of the twentieth century,
the ideas put forth by both Steinbeck and Guthrie were still prescient enough in 1995 to have made Springsteen pick them up, wipe off the Oklahoma dust and pass them on. As he says at the end of the performance of “Riding in my Car”: “Shit. Why didn’t I think of that?”
Primary Bibliography


Secondary Bibliography


**Appendix A – Springsteen Lyrics**

**The Ghost of Tom Joad**

Men walkin’ ‘long the railroad tracks  
Goin’ someplace there’s no goin’ back  
Highway patrol choppers comin’ up over the ridge  
Hot soup on a campfire under the bridge  
Shelter line stretchin’ round the corner  
Welcome to the new world order  
Families sleepin’ in their cars in the southwest  
No home no job no peace no rest

The highway is alive tonight  
But nobody’s kiddin’ nobody about where it goes  
I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light  
Searchin’ for the ghost of Tom Joad

He pulls prayer book out of his sleeping bag  
Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag  
Waitin’ for when the last shall be first and the first shall be last  
In a cardboard box ‘neath the underpass  
Got a one-way ticket to the promised land  
You got a hole in your belly and gun in your hand  
Sleeping on a pillow of solid rock  
Bathin’ in the city aqueduct

The highway is alive tonight  
But where it’s headed everybody knows  
I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light  
Waitin’ on the ghost of Tom Joad

Now Tom said “Mom, wherever there’s a cop beatin’ a guy  
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries  
Where there’s a fight ‘gainst the blood and hatred in the air  
Look for me Mom I’ll be there  
Wherever there’s somebody fightin’ for a place to stand  
Or decent job or a helpin’ hand  
Wherever somebody’s strugglin’ to be free  
Look in their eyes Mom you’ll see me.”

The highway is alive tonight  
But nobody’s kiddin’ nobody about where it goes  
I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light  
With the ghost of old Tom Joad
Straight Time

Got out of prison back in ‘86 and I found me a wife
Walked the clean and narrow
just tryin’ to stay out and stay alive
Got a job at the rendering factory, it ain’t gonna make me rich
In the darkness before dinner comes
Sometimes I can feel the itch
I got a cold mind to go tripping across that thin line
I’m sick of doin’ straight time

My uncle’s at the evenin’ table makes his living runnin’ hot cars
Slips me a hundred dollar bill, says
“Charlie, you best remember who your friend are.”
I got a cold mind to go tripping across that thin line
I ain’t makin’ straight time

Eight years in, it feels like you’re gonna die
But you get used to anything
Sooner or later it becomes your life

Kitchen floor in the evening, tossin’ my little babies high
Mary’s smilin’, but she watches me out of the corner of her eye
Seems you can’t get any more than half free
I step out onto the front porch, and suck the cold air deep inside of me
Got a cold mind to go tripping across that thin line
I’m sick of doin’ straight time

In the basement, huntin’ gun and a hacksaw
Sip a beer, and thirteen inches of barrel drop to the floor

Come home in the evening, can’t get the smell from my hands
Lay my head down on the pillow
And, go driftin’ off into foreign lands

Highway 29

I slipped on her shoe, she was a perfect size seven
I said “there’s no smokin’ in the store ma’am”
She crossed her legs and then
We made some small talk, that’s where it should have stopped
She slipped me a number, I put it in my pocket
My hand slipped up her skirt, everything slipped my mind
In that little roadhouse On highway 29
It was a small town bank, it was a mess
Well I had a gun, you know the rest
Money on the floorboards, shirt was covered in blood
And she was cryin’, her and me we headed south
On highway 29

In a little desert motel, the air it was hot and clean
I slept the sleep of the dead, I didn’t dream
I woke in the morning washed my face in the sink
We headed into the Sierra Madres ‘cross the borderline
The winter sun, shot through the black trees
I told myself it was all something in her
But as we drove I knew it was something in me
Something had been comin’ for a long long time
And something that was here with me now
On highway 29

The road was filled with broken glass and gasoline
She wasn’t sayin’ nothin’, it was just a dream
The wind come silent through the windshield
All I could see was snow and sky and pines

I closed my eyes and I was runnin’,
I was runnin’ then I was flyin’

Youngstown

Here in north east Ohio
Back in eighteen-o-three
James and Danny Heaton
Found the ore that was linin’ yellow creek
They built a blast furnace
Here along the shore
And they made the cannon balls
That helped the union win the war

Here in Youngstown
Here in Youngstown
My sweet Jenny, I’m sinkin’ down
Here darlin’ in Youngstown

Well my daddy worked the furnaces
Kept ‘em hotter than hell
I come home from ‘Nam worked my way to scarfer
A job that’d suit the devil as well
Taconite, coke and limestone
Fed my children and made my pay
Then smokestacks reachin’ like the arms of god
Into a beautiful sky of soot and clay

Here in Youngstown
Here in Youngstown
My sweet Jenny, I’m sinkin’ down
Here darlin’ in Youngstown

Well my daddy come on the Ohio works
When he come home from world war two
Now the yards just scrap and rubble
He said, “Them big boys did what Hitler couldn’t do”
These mills they built the tanks and bombs
That won this country’s wars
We sent our sons to Korea and Vietnam
Now we’re wondering what they were dyin’ for

Here in Youngstown
Here in Youngstown
My sweet Jenny, I’m sinkin’ down
Here darlin’ in Youngstown

From the Monongaleh valley
To the Mesabi iron range
To the coal mines of Appalachia
The story’s always the same
Seven-hundred tons of metal a day
Now sir you tell me the world’s changed
Once I made you rich enough
Rich enough to forget my name

In Youngstown
In Youngstown
My sweet Jenny, I’m sinkin’ down
Here darlin’ in Youngstown

When I die I don’t want no part of heaven
I would not do heavens work well
I pray the devil comes and takes me
To stand in the fiery furnaces of hell
Sinaloa Cowboys

Miguel came from a small town in northern Mexico. He came north with his brother Louis to California three years ago. They crossed at the river levee, when Louis was just sixteen. And found work together in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley.

They left their homes and family. Their father said, “My sons one thing you will learn, for everything the north gives, it exacts a price in return.” They worked side by side in the orchards. From morning till the day was through. Doing the work the hueros wouldn’t do.

Word was out some men in from Sinaloa were looking for some hands. Well, deep in Fresno county there was a deserted chicken ranch. And there in a small tin shack on the edge of a ravine, Miguel and Louis stood cooking methamphetamine. You could spend a year in the orchards. Or make half as much in one ten hour shift. Working for the men from Sinaloa.

But if you slipped the hydriodic acid. Could burn right through your skin. They’d leave you spittin’ up blood in the desert. If you breathed those fumes in.

It was early one winter evening as Miguel stood watch outside. When the shack exploded, lighting up the valley night. Miguel carried Louis’ body over his shoulder down a swale to the creekside and there in the tall grass, Louis Rosales died. Miguel lifted Louis’ body into his truck and then he drove to where the morning sunlight fell on a eucalyptus grove. There in the dirt he dug up ten-thousand dollars. All that they’d saved. Kissed his brother’s lips and placed him in his grave.

The Line

I got my discharge from Fort Irwin. took a place on the San Diego county line. felt funny bein’ a civilian again. it’d been some time. my wife had died a year ago. I was still tryin’ to find my way back whole.
went to work for the INS on the line
With the California Border Patrol

Bobby Ramirez was a ten-year veteran
We became friends
his family was from Guanajuato
so the job it was different for him
He said “They risk death in the deserts and mountains
pay all they got to the smugglers rings,
we send ‘em home and they come right back again
Carl, hunger is a powerful thing.”

Well I was good at doin’ what I was told
kept my uniform pressed and clean
at night I chased their shadows
through the arroyos and ravines
drug runners, farmers with their families,
young women with little children by their sides
come night we’d wait out in the canyons
and try to keep ‘em from crossin’ the line

Well the first time that I saw her
she was in the holdin’ pen

Our eyes met and she looked away
then she looked back again
her hair was black as coal
her eyes reminded me of what I’d lost
she had a young child cryin’ in her arms
and I asked, “Senora, is there anything I can do”

There’s a bar in Tijuana
where me and Bobby drink alongside
the same people we’d sent back the day before
we met there she said her name was Louisa
she was from Sonora and had just come north
we danced and I held her in my arms
and I knew what I would do
she said she had some family in Madera county
if she, her child and her younger brother could just get through

At night they come across the levy
in the searchlights dusty glow
we’d rush ‘em in our Broncos
and force ‘em back down into the river below
she climbed into my truck
she leaned towards me and we kissed
as we drove her brothers shirt slipped open
and I saw the tape across his chest

We were just about on the highway when Bobby’s jeep come
up in the dust on my right
I pulled over and let my engine run
and stepped out into his lights
I felt myself movin’
felt my gun restin’ ‘neath my hand
we stood there starin’ at each other
as off through the arroyo she ran

Bobby Ramirez he never said nothin’
6 months later I left the line
I drifted to the central valley
and took what work I could find
at night I searched the local bars
and the migrant towns
Lookin’ for my Louisa
with the black hair fallin’ down

Balboa Park

He lay his blanket underneath the freeway
As the evening sky grew dark
Took a sniff of toncho from his coke can
And headed through Balboa Park
Where the men in their Mercedes
Come nightly to employ
In the cool San Diego evening
The services of the border boys

He grew up near the Zona Norte
With the hustlers and smugglers he hung out with
He swallowed their balloons of cocaine
Brought ‘em across the Twelfth Street strip
Sleeping in a shelter
If the night got too cold
Runnin’ from the migra
Of the border patrol

Past the salvage yard ‘cross the train tracks
and in through the storm drain
they stretched their blankets out ‘neath the freeway
and each one took a name
there was X-man and Cochise
Little Spider his sneakers covered in river mud
they come north to California
end up with the poison in their blood

He did what he had to do for the money
sometimes he sent home what he could spare
the rest went to high-top sneakers and toncho
and jeans like the gavachos wear

One night the border patrol swept Twelfth Street
a big car come fast down the boulevard
spider stood caught in its headlights
got hit and went down hard
As the car sped away Spider held his stomach
limped to his blanket ‘neath the underpass
lie there tasting his own blood on his tongue
closed his eyes and listened to the cars
rushin’ by so fast

Across the Border

Tonight my bag is packed
Tomorrow I’ll walk these tracks
That will lead me across the border

Tomorrow my love and I
Will sleep ‘neath auburn skies
Somewhere across the border

We’ll leave behind my dear
The pain and sadness we found here
And we’ll drink from the Bravo’s muddy waters

Where the sky grows grey and white
We’ll meet on the other side
There across the border

For you I’ll build a house
High up on a grassy hill
Somewhere across the border

Where pain and memory
Pain and memory have been stilled
There across the border

And sweet blossoms fills the air
Pastures of gold and green
Roll down into cool clear waters

And in your arms ‘neath the open skies
I’ll kiss the sorrow from your eyes
There across the border

Tonight we’ll sing the songs
I’ll dream of you my corazon
And tomorrow my heart will be strong

And may the saints’ blessing and grace
Carry me safely into your arms
There across the border

For what are we
Without hope in our hearts
That someday we’ll drink from God’s blessed waters

And eat the fruit from the vine
I know love and fortune will be mine
Somewhere across the border

**Galveston Bay**

Fifteen years Le Bing Son
Fought side by side with the Americans
In the mountains and deltas of Vietnam

In ’75 Saigon fell
and he left his command
And brought his family to the promised land

Seabrook Texas and the small towns
in the Gulf of Mexico
It was delta country and reminded him of home

He worked as a machinist, put his money away
And bought a shrimp boat with his cousin
And together they harvested Galveston Bay

In the mornin’ ‘fore the sun come up
He’d kiss his sleepin’ daughter
Steer out through the channel
And casts his nets into the water

Billy Sutter fought with Charlie Company
In the highlands of Quang Tri
He was wounded in the battle of Chu Lai
And shipped home in ’68

There he married and worked the gulf fishing grounds
In a boat that’d been his father’s
In the morning he’d kiss his sleeping son
And cast his nets into the water

Billy sat in front of his TV as the south fell
And the Communists rolled into Saigon
He and his friends watched as the refugees came
Settle on the same streets and worked the coast they grew up on

Soon in the bars around the harbor was talk
Of America for Americans
Someone said, “You want ‘em out, you got to burn ‘em out”

And brought in the Texas klan
One humid Texas night there were three shadows on the harbor
Come to burn the Vietnamese boats into the sea
In the fire’s light shots rang out
Two Texans lay dead on the ground
Le stood with a pistol in his hand
A jury acquitted him in self defense
As before the judge he did stand
But as he walked down the courthouse steps
Billy said “My friend, you’re a dead man”

One late summer night Le stood watch along the waterside
Billy stood in the shadows
His K-bar knife in his hand
And the moon slipped behind the clouds
Le lit a cigarette, the bay was as still as glass
As he walked by Billy stuck his knife into his pocket
Took a breath and let him pass
In the early darkness Billy rose up
Went into the kitchen for a drink of water
Kissed his sleeping wife
Headed into the channel
And casts his nets into the water

**Part Man, Part Monkey**

They prosecuted some poor sucker in these United States
For teaching that man descended from the apes
They coulda settled that case without a fuss or fight
If they’d seen me chasin’ you, sugar, through the jungle last night
They’d called in that jury and a one two three said
Part man, part monkey, definitely

Well the church bell rings from the corner steeple
Man in a monkey suit swears he’ll do no evil
Offers his lover’s prayer but his soul lies
Dark and driftin’ and unsatisfied
Well hey bartender, tell me whaddaya see
Part man, part monkey, looks like to me
Appendix B – Guthrie Lyrics

Dust Bowl Blues

I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I’ll blow back out again.

I guess you’ve heard about ev’ry kind of blues,
I guess you’ve heard about ev’ry kind of blues,
But when the dust gets high, you can’t even see the sky.

I’ve seen the dust so black that I couldn’t see a thing,
I’ve seen the dust so black that I couldn’t see a thing,
And the wind so cold, boy, it nearly cut your water off.

I seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,
I’ve seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,
Buried my tractor six feet underground.

Well, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
Yes, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
I had to hit that road with a bottle in my hand.

I spent ten years down in that old dust bowl,
I spent ten years down in that old dust bowl,
When you get that dust pneumony, boy, it’s time to go.

I had a gal, and she was young and sweet,
I had a gal, and she was young and sweet,
But a dust storm buried her sixteen hundred feet.

She was a good gal, long, tall and stout,
Yes, she was a good gal, long, tall and stout,
I had to get a steam shovel just to dig my darlin’ out.

These dusty blues are the dustiest ones I know,
These dusty blues are the dustiest ones I know,
Buried head over heels in the black old dust,
I had to pack up and go.
An’ I just blowed in, an’ I’ll soon blow out again.

Dust Bowl Refugee

I’m a dust bowl refugee,
Just a dust bowl refugee,
From that dust bowl to the peach bowl,
Now that peach fuzz is a-killin’ me.
‘Cross the mountains to the sea,
Come the wife and kids and me.
It’s a hot old dusty highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Hard, it’s always been that way,
Here today and on our way
Down that mountain, ‘cross the desert,
Just a dust bowl refugee.

We are ramblers, so they say,
We are only here today,
Then we travel with the seasons,
We’re the dust bowl refugees.

From the south land and the drought land,
Come the wife and kids and me,
And this old world is a hard world
For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes, we ramble and we roam
And the highway that’s our home,
It’s a never-ending highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes, we wander and we work
In your crops and in your fruit,
Like the whirlwinds on the desert
That’s the dust bowl refugees.

I’m a dust bowl refugee,
I’m a dust bowl refugee,
And I wonder will I always
Be a dust bowl refugee?

**Dust Can’t Kill Me**

That old dust storm killed my baby,
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me.

That old dust storm killed my family,
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me.

That old landlord got my homestead,
But he can’t get me, Lord,
And he can’t get me.
That old dry spell killed my crop, boys,
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me.

That old tractor got my home, boys,
But it can’t get me, Lord
And it can’t get me.

That old tractor run my house down,
But it can’t get me down,
And it can’t get me.

That old pawn shop got my furniture,
But it can’t get me, Lord,
And it can’t get me.

That old highway’s got my relatives,
But it can’t get me, Lord,
And it can’t get me.

That old dust might kill my wheat, boys,
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me.

I have weathered a-many a dust storm,
But it can’t get me, boys,
And it can’t kill me.

That old dust storm, well, it blowed my barn down,
But it can’t blow me down,
And it can’t blow me down.

That old wind might blow this world down,
But it can’t blow me down,
It can’t kill me.

That old dust storm’s killed my baby,
But it can’t kill me, Lord
And it can’t kill me.

Dust Pneumonia Blues

I got that dust pneumony, pneumony in my lung,
I got the dust pneumony, pneumony in my lung,
An’ I’m a-gonna sing this dust pneumony song.
I went to the doctor, and the doctor, said, “My son,”
I went to the doctor, and the doctor, said, “My son,
You got that dust pneumony an’ you ain’t got long, not long.”

Now there ought to be some yodelin’ in this song;
Yeah, there ought to be some yodelin’ in this song;
But I can’t yodel for the rattlin’ in my lung.

My good gal sings the dust pneumony blues,
My good gal sings the dust pneumony blues,
She loves me ‘cause she’s got the dust pneumony, too.

If it wasn’t for choppin’ my hoe would turn to rust,
If it wasn’t for choppin’ my hoe would turn to rust,
I can’t find a woman in this black ol’ Texas dust.

Down in Oklahoma, the wind blows mighty strong,
Down in Oklahoma, the wind blows mighty strong,
If you want to get a mama, just sing a California song.

Down in Texas, my gal fainted in the rain,
Down in Texas, my gal fainted in the rain,
I threwed a bucket o’ dirt in her face just to bring her back again.

Goin’ Down The Road Feeling Bad

I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road,
I’m a blowin’ down this old dusty road,
I’m a blowin’ down this old dusty road, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this a-way.

I’m a goin’ where the water taste like wine,
I’m a goin’ where the water taste like wine,
I’m a goin’ where the water taste like wine, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

I’m a goin’ where the dust storms never blow,
I’m a goin’ where them dust storms never blow,
I’m a goin’ where them dust storms never blow, blow, blow,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

They say I’m a dust bowl refugee,
Yes, they say I’m a dust bowl refugee,
They say I’m a dust bowl refugee, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

I’m a lookin’ for a job at honest pay,
I’m a lookin’ for a job at honest pay,
I’m a-lookin’ for a job at honest pay, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

My children need three square meals a day,
Now, my children need three square meals a day,
My children need three square meals a day, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

It takes a ten-dollar shoe to fit my feet,
It takes a ten-dollar shoe to fit my feet,
It takes a ten-dollar shoe to fit my feet, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

Your a-two-dollar shoe hurts my feet,
Your two-dollar shoe hurts my feet,
Yes, your two-dollar shoe hurts my feet, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

I’m a-goin’ down this old dusty road,
I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road,
I’m a-blowin’ down this old dusty road, Lord, Lord,
An’ I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.

So Long, It’s Been Good To Know Yuh
(Dusty Old Dust)

I’ve sung this song, but I’ll sing it again,
Of the place that I lived on the wild windy plains,
In the month called April, county called Gray,
And here’s what all of the people there say:

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
This dusty old dust is a-getting’ my home,
And I got to be driftin’ along.

A dust storm hit, an’ it hit like thunder;
It dusted us over, an’ it covered us under;
Blocked out the traffic an’ blocked out the sun,
Straight for home all the people did run,
Singin’:

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-getting’ my home,
And I got to be driftin’ along.

We talked of the end of the world, and then
We’d sing a song an’ then sing it again.
We’d sit for an hour an’ not say a word,
And then these words would be heard:

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-getting’ my home,
And I got to be driftin’ along.

Sweethearts sat in the dark and sparked,
They hugged and kissed in that dusty old dark.
They sighed and cried, hugged and kissed,
Instead of marriage, they talked like this:
“Honey...”

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.

Now, the telephone rang, an’ it jumped off the wall,
That was the preacher, a-makin’ his call.
He said, “Kind friend, this may the end;
An’ you got your last chance of salvation of sin!”

The churches was jammed, and the churches was packed,
An’ that dusty old dust storm blowed so black.
Preacher could not read a word of his text,
An’ he folded his specs, an’ he took up collection,
Said:

So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh;
So long, it’s been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-getting’ my home,
And I got to be driftin’ along.
Tom Joad

Tom Joad got out of the old McAlester Pen; 
There he got his parole.
After four long years on a man killing charge,
Tom Joad come a-walkin’ down the road, poor boy,
Tom Joad come a-walkin’ down the road.

Tom Joad, he met a truck driving man;
There he caught him a ride.
He said, “I just got loose from McAlester Pen
On a charge called homicide,
A charge called homicide.”

That truck rolled away in a cloud of dust;
Tommy turned his face toward home.
He met Preacher Casey, and they had a little drink,
But they found that his family they was gone,
He found that his family they was gone.

He found his mother’s old fashion shoe,
Found his daddy’s hat.
And he found little Muley and Muley said,
“They’ve been tractored out by the cats,
They’ve been tractored out by the cats.”

Tom Joad walked down to the neighbor’s farm,
Found his family.
They took Preacher Casey and loaded in a car,
And his mother said, “We’ve got to get away.”
His mother said, “We’ve got to get away.”

Now, the twelve of the Joads made a mighty heavy load;
But Grandpa Joad did cry.
He picked up a handful of land in his hand,
Said: “I’m stayin’ with the farm till I die.
Yes, I’m stayin’ with the farm till I die.”

They fed him short ribs and coffee and soothing syrup;
And Grandpa Joad did die.
They buried Grandpa Joad by the side of the road,
Grandma on the California side,
They buried Grandma on the California side.

They stood on a mountain and they looked to the west,
And it looked like the promised land.
That bright green valley with a river running through,
There was work for every single hand, they thought,
There was work for every single hand.

**Tom Joad II**

The Joads rolled away to the jungle camp,
There they cooked a stew.
And the hungry little kids of the jungle camp
Said: “We’d like to have some, too.”
Said: “We’d like to have some, too.”

Now a deputy sheriff fired loose at a man,
Shot a woman in the back.
Before he could take his aim again,
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track, poor boy,
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.

They handcuffed Casey and they took him in jail;
And then he got away.
And he met Tom Joad on the old river bridge,
And these few words he did say, poor boy,
These few words he did say.

“I preached for the Lord a mighty long time,
Preached about the rich and the poor.
Us workin’ folkse, all get together,
‘Cause we ain’t got a chance anymore.
We ain’t got a chance anymore.”

Now, the deputies come, and Tom and Casey run
To the bridge where the water run down.
But the vigilante thugs hit Casey with a club,
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground, poor Casey,
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.

Tom Joad, he grabbed that deputy’s club,
Hit him over the head.
Tom Joad took flight in the dark rainy night,
And a deputy and a preacher lying dead, two men,
A deputy and a preacher lying dead.

Tom run back where his mother was asleep;
He woke her up out of bed.
An’ he kissed goodbye to the mother that he loved,
Said what Preacher Casey said, Tom Joad,
He said what Preacher Casey said.
“Ever’body might be just one big soul,
Well it looks that a-way to me.
Everywhere that you look, in the day or night,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be, Ma,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,
Wherever people ain’t free.
Wherever men are fightin’ for their rights,
That’s where I’m a-gonna be, Ma.
That’s where I’m a-gonna be.”

**I Ain’t Got No Home**

I ain’t got no home, I’m just a-roamin’ ‘round,
Just a wandrin’ worker, I go from town to town.
And the police make it hard wherever I may go
And I ain’t got no home in this world anymore.

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,
A hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod;
Rich man took my home and drove me from my door
And I ain’t got no home in this world anymore.

I mined in your mines and I gathered in your corn
I been working, mister, since the day I was born
Now I worry all the time like I never did before
‘Cause I ain’t got no home in this world anymore

Now as I look around, it’s mighty plain to see
This world is such a great and a funny place to be;
Oh, the gamblin’ man is rich an’ the workin’ man is poor,
And I ain’t got no home in this world anymore.

**Greenback Dollar**

I don’t want your millions, mister.
I don’t want your diamond ring.
All I want is the right to live mister.
Give me back my job again.

I don’t want your Rolls Royce, mister,
I don’t want your pleasure yacht,
All I want is food for my babies,
Now give to me my old job back.

I don’t want your millions, mister.
I don’t want your diamond ring.
All I want is the right to live mister.
Give me back my job again.

We worked to build this country, mister,
While you enjoyed a life of ease.
You’ve stolen all that we’ve built, mister,
Now our children starve and freeze.

I don’t want your millions, mister.
I don’t want your diamond ring.
All I want is the right to live mister.
Give me back my job again.

Yes, you have a land deed, mister,
The money is all in your name.
But where’s the work that you did, mister?
I’m demanding back my job again.

Think me dumb if you wish, mister,
Call me green or blue or red.
There’s just one thing that I know, mister,
Our hungry babies must be fed.

I don’t want your millions, mister.
I don’t want your diamond ring.
All I want is the right to live mister.
Give me back my job again.

We’ll organize together, mister,
In one big united band,
And with a Farmer-Labor party
We will win our just demands.

I don’t want your millions, mister.
I don’t want your diamond ring.
All I want is the right to live mister.
Give me back my job again.
Take the two old parties, mister,
No difference in them I can see.
But with a Farmer-Labor party,
We will set the workers free.
Appendix C – “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
“As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.”

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.