

SEMIOTICS IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

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Abstract

This article analyzes signs aspects of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* by using the Pierce's concept of semiotics. This article analyzes the semiotic aspects of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* by using the Pierce's concept of symbolic that is symbol, iconic and index. Symbol in Steinbeck's the grapes of wrath is road. Iconic in Steinbeck's *the Grapes of Wrath* is music. Index in Steinbeck's *the Grapes of Wrath* is bank.

Keywords: *Symbol, Iconic, Index*

INRODUCTION

Peirce explains that people think only in signs (1931-58, 2.302). Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. 'Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign', declares Peirce (Peirce 1931-58, 2.172). Peirce describes that people seem as a species to be driven by a desire to make meanings: above all, we are surely *Homo significans* - meaning-makers (1931-58, 2.302). Distinctively, people make meanings through our creation and interpretation of 'signs'. Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying'

something - referring to or *standing for* something other than itself. This article analyzes symbolic meaning in Steinbeck's *the Grapes of Wrath*. The Joads travel westward, Route 66 becomes "the mother road, the road of flight" (12.1) it's the lifeline, the thing that allows thousands of families to pursue their hopes and dreams. It is also (depressingly enough) the road that leads to their misery in California. It's symbolically significant that Route 66 never really intersects with any other major highway or road it goes in two directions only. When you're on Route 66, you can either go forward in search of opportunity and possible hardship, or you can go backwards and return to the poverty and familiarity you came from. We also learn that roads are dangerous places. If you're a turtle

or a dog trying to cross the road, beware: there's a good chance that you will get away by a sadistic driver. In the world of this novel, drivers like to create road-kill.

Saussure offered a 'dyadic' or two-part model of the sign. He defined a sign as being composed of:

- a 'signifier' (*signifiant*) - the *form* which the sign takes; and
- the 'signified' (*signifié*) - the *concept* it represents.

The *sign* is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified (Saussure 1983, 67; Saussure 1974, 67). A sign must have both a signifier and a signified. You cannot have a totally meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified (Saussure 1983, 101; Saussure 1974, 102-103). A sign is a recognizable combination of a signifier with a particular signified. The same signifier (the word 'open') could stand for a different signified (and thus be a different sign) if it were on a push-button inside a lift ('push to open door'). Similarly, many signifiers could stand for the concept 'open' (for instance, on top of a packing carton, a small outline of a box with an open flap for 'open this end') -

again, with each unique pairing constituting a different sign.

Nowadays, whilst the basic 'Saussurean' model is commonly adopted, it tends to be a more materialistic model than that of Saussure himself. The *signifier* is now commonly interpreted as the *material (or physical) form* of the sign - it is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted. For Saussure, both the signifier and the signified were purely 'psychological' (Saussure 1983, 12, 14-15, 66; Saussure 1974, 12, 15, 65-66)

Peirce, clearly fascinated by tripartite structures, made a phenomenological distinction between the sign itself [or the representamen] as an instance of 'Firstness', its object as an instance of 'Secondness' and the interpretant as an instance of 'Thirdness'. Such unfamiliar terms are relatively modest examples of Peircean coinages, and the complexity of his terminology and style has been a factor in limiting the influence of a distinctively Peircean semiotics

Here then are the three modes of sign according to Peirce:

Symbol/symbolic: a mode in which the signifier does *not* resemble the signified but which is fundamentally *arbitrary* or purely

conventional - so that the relationship must be learnt. In Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* describes symbolic that Route 66 never really intersects with any other major highway or road it goes in two directions only. When you're on Route 66, you can either go forward in search of opportunity and possible hardship, or you can go backwards and return to the poverty and familiarity you came from

Icon/iconic: a mode in which the signifier is perceived as *resembling* or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) - being similar in possessing some of its qualities: e.g. a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, 'realistic' sounds in 'programme music', sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures. For the Joads in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, this weird car-music was the most important, because it told them whether their sole means of transportation was in working order or not. Learning to listen to the car's music becomes a means of survival

Index/indexical: a mode in which the signifier is *not arbitrary* but is *directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified - this link can be observed or inferred: e.g. 'natural signs'

(smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), 'signals' (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing 'index' finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice), personal 'trademarks' (handwriting, catchphrase) and indexical words ('that', 'this', 'here', 'there'). In Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, banks in the East are hungry for money, but we never get to see the faces of their agents, we never meet a specific landowner or banker. We only know they exist, and that they are turning families out of their homes.

This article analyzes the symbolism aspects of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* by using the Peirce's concept of symbol.

RESEARCH METHOD

Verification of the data or triangulation is used to verify the trustworthiness of the findings. There are three types of triangulation. The first types are "Data Sources Triangulation". It involves the convergence of multiple data sources. The second types are "Methodological Triangulation" that includes the convergence

of data from multiple data collection procedures. "Expert triangulation" is used when a researcher uses expert or master to check or validate the validity of data obtain. (Denzin, 1989:71). However, in this research, the writer only combines two types of triangulation. First, triangulation with multiple data sources triangulation by checking the data findings related to the source or the data. Second using "Expert triangulation", the writer asked and consulted to the advisor who master in literary works. The researcher uses both types of triangulation to strengthen the data and achieve a valid result

DISCUSSION

This article analyzes the semiotic aspects of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* by using the Pierce's concept of symbolic. Symbol in Steinbeck's *the grapes of wrath* is road. Iconic in Steinbeck's *the Grapes of Wrath* is music. Index in Steinbeck's *the Grapes of Wrath* is bank

1. Symbol in Steinbeck's the grapes of wrath is road

From the minute we watch Tom Joad return home after four years in prison, roads take on great meaning. They're synonymous with both home and opportunity, comfort and

hardship, the known and the unknown. When he gazes at the road that will take him home at last, his "dark quiet eyes became amused as he stared" (2.53).

But as the Joads travel westward, Route 66 becomes "the mother road, the road of flight" (12.1) it's the lifeline, the thing that allows thousands of families to pursue their hopes and dreams. It is also (depressingly enough) the road that leads to their misery in California.

It's symbolically significant that Route 66 never really intersects with any other major highway or road it goes in two directions only. When you're on Route 66, you can either go forward in search of opportunity and possible hardship, or you can go backwards and return to the poverty and familiarity you came from. The journey to California in a rickety used truck is long and arduous. Grampa Joad, a feisty old man who complains bitterly that he does not want to leave his land, dies on the road shortly after the family's departure. Dilapidated cars and trucks, loaded down with scrappy possessions, clog Highway 66: it seems the entire country is in flight to the Promised Land of California. The Joads meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple plagued with car trouble, and invite them to travel with the family. Sairy Wilson is sick and, near the

California border, becomes unable to continue the journey.

As the Joads near California, they hear ominous rumors of a depleted job market. One migrant tells Pa that 20,000 people show up for every 800 jobs and that his own children have starved to death. Although the Joads press on, their first days in California prove tragic, as Granma Joad dies. The remaining family members move from one squalid camp to the next, looking in vain for work, struggling to find food, and trying desperately to hold their family together. Noah, the oldest of the Joad children, soon abandons the family, as does Connie, a young dreamer who is married to Tom's pregnant sister, Rose of Sharon.

The Joads meet with much hostility in California. The camps are overcrowded and full of starving migrants, who are often nasty to each other. The locals are fearful and angry at the flood of newcomers, whom they derisively label "Okies." Work is almost impossible to find or pays such a meager wage that a family's full day's work cannot buy a decent meal. Fearing an uprising, the large landowners do everything in their power to keep the migrants poor and dependent. While staying in a ramshackle camp known as a "Hooverville," Tom and

several men get into a heated argument with a deputy sheriff over whether workers should organize into a union. When the argument turns violent, Jim Casy knocks the sheriff unconscious and is arrested. Police officers arrive and announce their intention to burn the Hooverville to the ground.

A government-run camp proves much more hospitable to the Joads, and the family soon finds many friends and a bit of work. However, one day, while working at a pipe-laying job, Tom learns that the police are planning to stage a riot in the camp, which will allow them to shut down the facilities. By alerting and organizing the men in the camp, Tom helps to defuse the danger. Still, as pleasant as life in the government camp is, the Joads cannot survive without steady work, and they have to move on. They find employment picking fruit, but soon learn that they are earning a decent wage only because they have been hired to break a workers' strike. Tom runs into Jim Casy who, after being released from jail, has begun organizing workers; in the process, Casy has made many enemies among the landowners. When the police hunt him down and kill him in Tom's presence, Tom retaliates and kills a police officer.

Tom goes into hiding, while the family moves into a boxcar on a cotton farm. One day, Ruthie, the youngest Joad daughter, reveals to a girl in the camp that her brother has killed two men and is hiding nearby. Fearing for his safety, Ma Joad finds Tom and sends him away. Tom heads off to fulfill Jim's task of organizing the migrant workers. The end of the cotton season means the end of work, and word sweeps across the land that there are no jobs to be had for three months. Rains set in and flood the land. Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn child, and Ma, desperate to get her family to safety from the floods, leads them to a dry barn not far away. Here, they find a young boy kneeling over his father, who is slowly starving to death. He has not eaten for days, giving whatever food he had to his son. Realizing that Rose of Sharon is now producing milk, Ma sends the others outside, so that her daughter can nurse the dying man

We also learn that roads are dangerous places. If you're a turtle or a dog trying to cross the road, beware: there's a good chance that you will get smushed by a sadistic driver. In the world of this novel, drivers like to create road-kill. The road can also be dangerous if your car breaks down far from the next town—in the 1930s telephones were few and far between, and if you were down

and out in the 1930s there was a good chance that the mechanics along the way would be absolute dirtbags towards you

2. Iconic in Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath is music

In the days before playlists, you got music where you could: from a banjo, a harmonica, a washboard... or even a car. For the Joads, this weird car-music was the most important, because it told them whether their sole means of transportation was in working order or not.

When we have no choice but to buy a used car from a slimy used-car salesman (is there any other kind, at least in literature?) we have to listen intently for the car's rhythms and melodies. Learning to listen to the car's music becomes a means of survival. One family listens as "the high hum of the motor dulled and the song of the tires dropped in pitch" (2.64), and our narrator describes the panic and anxiety that comes from driving a used car across the country:

Listen to the motor. Listen to the wheels. Listen with your ears and with your hands on the steering wheel; listen with the palm of our hand on the gear-shift level; listen with your feet on the floor boards. Listen to the pounding old jalopy with all your senses, for a change of tone, a variation of rhythm may mean – a week here? (12.6)

That's a terrifying sort of music. We're not going to create a "Broken Car" channel on Pandora any time soon.

Speaking of terrifying music: The Grapes of Wrath gives us that

fascinating tidbit that Tom Joad made and heard more music in prison than he does when he is a free man. He even tells the preacher, "me an' some guys had a strang band goin'. Good one. Guy said we ought to go on the radio" (4.68).

3.Index in Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath is Bank Monsters Inc.

Steinbeck's the grapes of wrath, Joad do not want these things hiding out under Joad's bed. Or in Joad's closet. Or anywhere near Joad's farm. When landowners kick tenant farmers off of the land, they tell them that the banks are hungry, that the bank is part of a hungry monster that cannot be sated. The tractors become:

[...] snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through dooryards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. (5.41)

When the tenant farmers try to figure out who is in charge, who they can complain to, the tractor-monsters simply say,

Fellow was telling me the bank gets orders from the East. The orders were, 'Make the land show profit or we'll close you up. (5.63)

There is no one, specific person to blame, no single person in charge. The banks in the East are hungry for money, but we never get

to see the faces of their agents, we never meet a specific landowner or banker. We only know they exist, and that they are turning families out of their homes

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the semiotic aspects of Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath by using the Pierce's concept of symbolic. Symbol in Steinbeck's the grapes of wrath is road. Iconic in Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath is music. Index in Steinbeck's the Grapes of Wrath is bank.

SUGGESTIONS

The values of the semiotics are universal that can experienced by people around the world who have fantasy on gaining better, richer, fuller life for everyone, with opportunity according to ability or achievement regardless their social, religion, and racial background. Thus, it is an obligation for everyone in the world to fight for making the values semiotics bear on the world in order to make a better world wherever he lives.

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