



Biblical Allusion in John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath: Some Person as a Study Case

Rana Noori Awad ALASADI^{1,2}

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Social Science Institute, Firat University, Elazığ, Türkiye.

²Duhok Polytechnic University, Duhok Technical Institute, Department of Manufacturing Technology, Duhok, Iraq.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at shedding light on Biblical allusion, concerning some persons, in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. It is divided into an introduction and three other sections. The introduction presents the importance of literature and those who work in its field and some definitions of allusion. The second section tackles the importance of the Old Man and how this character add symbolic dimensions to the novel. In additional, his image is similar to the image of some Biblical characters. The third section is devoted to the twelve members. The number twelve is constantly repeated in The Grapes of Wrath. It can refer to the twelve clans in the old Testament. The fourth section deals with the three visitors who are a clear allusion to the passage of "The visit of the Magi" after the birth of Jesus Crist. Then comes the conclusion which sums up the results of the study.

1. Introduction

The world of literature is very wide. It is as deep as the ocean; full of secrets and miracles. The writer is a diver who discovers this world and tries to tell his readers what he has seen or discovered. Donald Hall describes literature as a great medium that affects our sensations:

Great literature, if we read it well, opens us up to the world It makes us more sensitive to it as if we acquired eyes, that cloud see though things and ears that could hear smaller sounds. (Guth & Rico, 1993)

It is an invitation to read literature on all its genres, prose, fiction, poetry and drama and to share more fully in human experience. Great literary works are products of minds of writers who have insight to watch, analyse, criticise and write down what they think, feel or what is important. They give benefit with aesthetic touch to their words to be read and then the reader can make use of it to understand the world around him Original writers have their own skills in writing and presenting their ideas and thoughts or showing different views about the world. They perform this through using linguistics techniques

Corresponding author:

E-mail address: rananoori2020@gmail.com

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which include rhetorical devices, terms and figures of speech. These techniques enrich their literary works and give them a great value, Allusion is one of them. It is widely used by the writers who are intelligent and well-educated and have the ability to busy the mind of the reader by thinking about every single word written. It is used in literary works like poetry, drama and novel, of western world literature and other nations

literature. The definition of allusion varies according to the writers' point of view and the way they use it.

1.1 Definitions of Allusion

More than one definition is given to clarify the meaning of the allusion. These definitions depend on the writer's point of view and use as it is said before. The American poet, critic and philosopher Emerson defines allusion as: *"A reference without lengthy explanation to literature, history or current event"* (Altenbernd & Lewis, 1966). While M. H. Abram sees that it is:

a brief reference explicit or indirect to a person, place, or event or to another literary work or passage and it is left to the reader or hearer to make the connection.
(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allusion>)

So both critics have the same idea about the nature of allusion but the later leads us to think about the theory of the death of the author in which Barthes argues that: - *"It is the language which speaks not the author"* (Webster, 1990,p.19)

This means that allusion could be like a symbol that expresses something. The language of allusion is like the language of computer. It has certain words or symbols that expresses very complicated process of explaining what is behind the words. The language of allusion is economic and it is a kind of short hand. It is also defined as *"a verbal economy"* (Bergman & Epstein, 1984). Joseph T. Shipley also defined allusion as the following:

Originally a parable, now an indication of something without direct mention of it. Direct mention is a reference. A common type of allusion in

poetry is quotation of a word or so from another work without identifying or acknowledging it.

(Shipley, 1970).

Although, the parable means a tale and it is more than a word or phrase, but it may refer to a wisdom or certain idea which is told to remind us with it indirectly. Shipley also mentioned that quotation and reference are types of allusion.

1.2. The Old Men

A male in general an important case for discussion whether he was man or woman, old or young, a child or an infant. In most literary works, the role of the protagonist given to men. This due to their important role in life and society which is controlled by men. They are leaders, controllers, soldiers, workers, scientists, religious men, sons and fathers. The male is also a symbol of power, safe and history. Only man can keep the history of his nation.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* there are two old men played an important role and gave the novel a symbolic dimension. The first old man was the Grampa who died of a stroke a short while of going out of Oklahoma.

Gramps seemed to struggling; all his muscles twitched. And suddenly he jarred as though under a heavy blow. He lay still and his breath was stopped. Casy looked down at the Old man's face and saw that it was turning a blackish purpl.

Gramma hopped like a chicken and she was praying for sake of Grampa and asking the others and the preacher to pray. The following lines are direct quotations from the Bible

Our Father who are in Heavn, hollowed

be They name___

"Glory!" shouted Gramma

"The Kingdom come. They will be.

Done___ on earth __as it is in Heaven"

"Amen"

(Bible,1999)

After these prayers, they heard the last crying release of air from Grampa's mouth, they prayed saying *"Give us this day-our daily bread - and forgive us_"* (Mathew, p. 1430). At last the Grampa died and Casy said *"A good stroke"*. After his death, they buried him with the help of Mr. Wilson. They should have reported his death, but it cost forty dollars therefore, Tom wrote notes about Grampa's death and put it in a bottle buried with him. Pa Joad was sad for the death of his father out of his home. Grampa didn't like to leave his land and he died in a strange land, buried by a stranger. Pa Joad said softly:

Grampa buried his Pa with his own hand, done it in dignity, an' shaped the grave nice with his own shovel. That was a time when a man had the right to be buried by his own son an' a son had the right to bury his own father.

This means that the migrant does not have a home that keeps his dignity and identity among other people who have homes,

The home is the place that one gives birth to babies in, live and builds houses and then buries his dead in it. What happened to Grampa refers to the loss of identity and home. It also refers to the death of the past tradition, identity and origin. When Grampa died they read some words from the "scripture" in order to make religious funeral. Tom turned the pages to "Psalms" and he chose the following lines *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"* (Psalms, p. 894). The scripture is very clear allusion to the bible and its part and it is a direct quotation don't like to pray no more *"But Casy refused saying that he doesn't know if the man was good or bad"*. The family felt that they were a unit and now they began to be fragmented. *Grampa represents the old place "Grampa an' the old place, they jus' the same thing"*. The death of the Grampa also represents the death of the old ideas and reading Psalms means The Old Testament governs people's thoughts. However, the Grampa's character is an allusion to the biblical passage of "The Rescue of Lot and His Family". *"But Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt"* (<http://www.123Biblical> AllusionandImageryinSteinbeck'sTheGrapesof Wrathp.3 of 8). Grampa is like Lot's wife. Both lost their life after leaving their lands. The allusion to

this biblical passage is parallel although they were different in sex.

The other old man in the novel appears at the end in the barn. He was about to die. He was found there when the flood came and people tried to find a shelter. Rose of Sharon who gave birth a dead baby mouthed the unknown old man her breast to suckle to save his life.

Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast "You got to".

Then Rose smiled mysteriously *"She looked up across the barn and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously"*. This situation may have various interpretation. Psychologically, Rose wanted to satisfy her motherhood in suckling the old man. In another case, the old man represents the past while Rose represents the new life. She wants to relive the dream of the past of having the Grapes in the Promised Land. The Grampa one day said:

I am gonna pick me a wash tub full of grapes, an'

I'm gonna set in 'em, an' scrooge aroun' an' let the juice run down my pants.

The grapes are the source of life for Grampa and Joad family and the source of life for the old man is the breast of Rose of Sharon and this is an allusion to the "Song of Songs" in which there is a description of the breast of Rose of Sharon as a source of life or a cluster of grapes.

Your stature is like that of the palm and your

breasts like clusters of fruit. (Song of Songs, p. 1036)

The allusion to this biblical passage is parallel. The dream of the Grampa of tub full of grapes and the salvation of the other man in having Rose's breast direct the attention towards the idea of achieving the old dream of a good or the Promised Land. The first old man the Grampa, could not achieve his dream because he did not want to leave the land of his father, therefore, the Promised Land was only a dream. The second unknown old man could get rid of death, but he is an old man and the man is mortal by nature and his dreams are mortal too,

Rose's mysteriously smile may express her depression and suckling the old man means trying to prolong life even for a while. Still the matter of achieving the old men's dream is unknown and mysterious short, they were symbolic, effective and presented hidden and philosophical ideas.

1.3. The Twelve Members

The number twelve is highly mentioned in the novel The Grapes of Wrath as well as in the bible. For example, the twelve stones in "The memorial stones" (Joshua, p. 358) and twelve curse in "curses from Mount Ebal" (Deuteronomy, p. 337). In the novel the twelve persons are mentioned clearly in the following lines.

*There is Grammpa an' Gramma--that's two. An'
me an' John an' Ma--- rhat's five An' Noah an'
Tomy an' At. that's eight. Rose Sharon an' connie
is ten. Ruthie an' Winfield is twelve.*

These were the twelve people who left Oklahoma towards the Promised Land California. The allusion is directed to the biblical passage of "The second Census"

*They were the Israelites who came out of Egypt.
"The clans of Reuben, The clans of Simeon.
The clans of God. The clans of Judah, The clans of
Issachar The clans of Zebulun, The clans of
Manasseh The clans of Ephraim, The clans of
Benjamin, The clans of
Dan, The clans of Asher. The clans of Naphtali.*

(Numbers, p. 268)

Both texts are parallel and the parallelism lies in the number of the people. Both the Hebrew were twelve clans and the Joad family were twelve. Both of them suffered the wrath of the authority and of their country obligatory.

1.4. The Three Visitors

Another group of people that is mentioned in the novel only once is the three visitors. When the Okies held the Sabbath, three young men came to the party to disturb others, but Tom and other men could prevent them from doing anything:

*Tom stood near the three young men He saw them
force their way through out on the floor, towards
one of the forming squares---
The Three reached the square, And one of them
said "I'll dance with this here" A blond boy looked
up in astonishment "She's my partner" listen you a
little son__ of __birth __ They, were about to quarrel.*

This text is an allusion to the biblical passage of "The visit of the Magi".

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during
the time of king Herod Magi from the east came to
Jerusalem and asked where is the one who has
been born king of the Jew? (Mathew, p.
1423)*

The allusion to this biblical text is contrast, the three visitors in the novel came to create problem and they were sent by an officer called Jackson while the Magi came to see the boy that what Mary gave birth to. They were believers and came to bow to the newly born baby.

Conclusion

Myths, fables and religions are highly affecting sources on the writings of playwrights, novelists, poets and even essayists. John Steinbeck is one of those who find in some Biblical characters a source of inspiration to John Steinbeck who derives his title "The Grapes of Wrath" from a Biblical incident. The narrative of some persons in the Bible are profession employed in Steinbeck's novel. Most of them are used in a parallel way with the exception of the three visitors who contrast the Biblical known story. Seems that Steinbeck wrote his novel depending on the stored Biblical events.

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