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**“I don’t know nobody name Jesus”: Jim Casy’s Journey from Christianity to  
Transcendentalism in *The Grapes of Wrath*  
Komi Begedou\***

**Abstract**

*Although the surface narrative in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* focuses on the plight of migrant workers fleeing the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression, the author’s meditation on the role of Christianity as a sustaining force in the lives of the migrants permeates the novel from beginning to end. Whereas readers generally recognize Steinbeck’s Christian allusions, many miss his skillful rendering of Transcendentalist beliefs filtered through Jim Casy’s quest for spiritual fulfillment. Using an intertextual approach, my paper explores Steinbeck’s rationale for creating a character who is simultaneously similar to and yet different from the conventional figure known as Jesus Christ.*

**Key words:** *Intertextuality, Christianity, Transcendentalism, Journey, Analysis.*

**Résumé**

*Bien que d’une manière générale le récit de *Les raisins de la colère* écrit par John Steinbeck se concentre sur le sort des travailleurs migrants qui fuyaient le Dust Bowl au cours de la Grande Dépression, la focalisation de l’auteur sur le rôle du christianisme consistant à soutenir ces migrants se faufile tout au long du roman du début jusqu’à la fin. Alors que plusieurs critiques littéraires reconnaissent généralement les allusions faites à la Bible dans le roman, la plupart manquent de prêter attention à son message lié au transcendantalisme véhiculé à travers la quête de Jim Casy en vue de son épanouissement spirituel. S’inspirant de l’approche intertextuelle, cet article explore la raison pour laquelle Steinbeck a créé un tel personnage qui est la fois semblable et en même temps différent de Jésus Christ.*

**Mots clés:** *Intertextualité, Christianisme, Transcendantalisme, Voyage, Analyse.*

*“I was a preacher, said the man seriously  
Reverend Jim Casy” [...] “I ain’t a preacher  
no more.” [...] “I tol’ you I ain’t a preacher  
no more” [...] an’ I can remember – all of it.  
Says one time he went out in the wilderness  
to find his own soul, an’ he foun’ he didn’t  
have no soul that was his’n. Says he foun’ he*

---

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*jus' got a little piece of a great big soul.  
Wasn't any good'less it was with the rest,  
an'was whole"*

*John Steinbeck*

These statements from Jim Casy and the narrator of *The Grapes of Wrath* (hereafter TGOW) gives a hint about a spiritual journey from Christianity to the Oversoul. I agree with many critics who rightly argue that John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is full of biblical allusions and imagery, as well as characters who serve as Christ figures: Jim Casy, Tom Joad, and Rose of Sharon. Nevertheless, I also think there is a need to analyze the differences between the Christ figures in the novel and Jesus Christ himself. Steinbeck's creation of Jim Casy, who is simultaneously similar to, and different from, Jesus Christ in many ways, is his means of challenging Christianity, which to some extent has led to Capitalism and its injustices. Through the journey of Jim Casy from Christianity to Transcendentalism, Steinbeck offers Transcendentalism as the best system of belief for soothing the pain of the poor farmers in the novel.

The majority of critics analyzing John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* focus on the overt topics of the text: the plights of the Okies (the migrant farmers), the Great Depression, the horrors of Capitalisms, feminism etc. Other critics analyze the novel from a religious perspective. John J. Han's "Jesus as a Cultural Hero: Steinbeck's Use of the Christ Figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*," Charles T. Dougherty's "The Christ-Figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*," H. Kelly Crockett's "The Bible and *The Grapes of Wrath*," Tamara Rombold's "Biblical Inversion in *The Grapes of Wrath*," and Martin Shockley's "Christian Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*," are few important examples of this approach. All of them agree that there are many biblical allusions in the novel, and that Jim Casy is a Christ figure. However, they fail to highlight the difference between Casy and Christ and to explore the new religion embraced by Casy.

Because of many biblical allusions in the novel, it needs to be analyzed intertextually. Intertextuality can simply be defined as the shaping of textual meaning by referencing or borrowing from another text. In addition, though, intertextuality is "our response to any text – or the principles of practical criticism we apply to it" (Bressler 8). It can be inferred from this definition that our response to any text heavily relies on our past experiences. For Charles E. Bressler, "consciously or unconsciously, we have developed a mind-set or framework that accommodates our expectations when reading a novel, short story, poem or any other

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type of literature” (8). Jim Casy can, therefore, be analyzed differently depending upon the background against which one reads the novel.

Christianity is one of the themes amply developed in the novel, but Steinbeck seems to challenge it; his novel suggests that Christianity has contributed, in one way or the other, to the birth of capitalism. The Protestant ethic that stemmed from some beliefs of Puritanism led to capitalism that compels people to be individualistic and selfish. Capitalism is therefore to some extent at the source of people’s suffering. It is obvious that the poor in general, and the Joads in particular, were sent away from their land and had to keep moving throughout the novel because of capitalism – specifically, the needs of the land owners. The reading of *The Grapes of Wrath*, especially the analysis of Jim Casy, reveals that the author criticizes both the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism that promote values such as selfish ambition, forceful hard work, individualism and an intense quest for personal success.

As said earlier, there are various biblical allusions in the novel. They range from the construction of the plot to the representation of characters. A close reading of the novel shows that the whole plot of the novel is an allusion to events in *The Bible*, especially the story of the children of Israel in Egypt, their exodus in the wilderness, and their settlement in the Promised Land.

As far as the similarities between Jim Casy and Jesus Christ are concerned, they share a number of traits. I am considering four similarities that are most obvious. One telling similarity between Casy and Christ is that they share the same initials, “J.C.” The choice of these initials is not a mere coincidence because beyond their having the same initials, many of their actions are similar. A more significant similarity between them is that both spent some time in the wilderness alone before their public ministry. According to *The Holy Bible*, Christ went into the desert for a period of forty days of intense prayer to the Father before coming into his public life of preaching. “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness [...] And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered” (Mat. 4:1-2). Casy follows a slightly different but on the whole similar pattern. The narrator tells the reader that Casy spent four years away from society before appearing with his fully developed religious beliefs. “The preacher leaned forward and the yellow lantern light fell on his high pale forehead. ‘Here’s me, been a – goin’ into the wilderness like Jesus to try find out somepin. Almost got her sometimes, too “” (TGOW 421). This citation clearly exemplifies the similarity between Casy and Christ.



Moreover, the similarity between Christ and Casy is emphasized by the words they uttered toward their persecutors when they were facing death. Jesus said: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Casy uttered the same words towards his persecutors:

You fellas don't know what you're doin'. You're helpin' to starve kids [...]  
Casy went on, "you don' know what you're a-doin'." The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crushed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone, and Casy fell sideways out of the lifts. (TGOW 428)

In death, too, Casy bears a similarity to Christ, who gave himself up to save mankind from its sin. Jesus said: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life to the sheep" (John 10:10-11). Likewise, Casy gives up himself to save the life of Tom, who trips a police officer trying to break up a camp of the vagrant farmers dispossessed from their lands.

It is therefore obvious that Casy echoes Jesus Christ in his life as well as in death. This reveals the similarity between Jim Casy and Jesus Christ, but more intriguing are the ways Casy and Christ differ, and what those differences suggest about Steinbeck's goals for the novel.

In spite of his seeming Christianity, Casy is not a strict Christian, which of course differentiates him from Jesus Christ. Casy was involved in immoral acts, even as a preacher. "I used to get the people jumpin' an' talkin' in tongues and glory – shoutin' till they just fell down an' passed out. An' some I'd baptize to bring'em to. An' them – you know what I'd do? I'd take one of them girls out in the grass, an' I'd lay with her. Done it ever' time." (TGOW 22). Casy is a hypocrite because he was going against the tenets of the Christian faith, which require everybody to abstain from immorality. This portrayal suggests that Steinbeck wants to show that the Christian religion is leading some people to be hypocrites by setting unrealistically high moral standards for them. This fact can also be seen in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, even though he is a preacher, commits immorality and hides it from the people. He appears before men as a man of God but in his inner self he knows he is a hypocrite and this leads to his eventual death. It is in this same vein that James Baldwin writes, "It is not too much to say that whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being must

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first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes and hypocrisies of the Christian Church” (Wauthier 211- 212). Casy, as a preacher, is supposed to live a virtuous life, but surprisingly he sleeps with not only one girl but with many girls.

Steinbeck presents the Christian religion as a religion that cannot set man free. The more Casy prays and invites people not to commit immorality, the more he is exposed to it. He says after sleeping with the girls, “Then I’d feel bad, an’ I’d pray an’ pray, but it didn’t do no good. Come the next time, them an’ me was full of the Spirit, I’d do it again. I figgered there just wasn’t hope for me, an’ I was a damned ol’ hypocrite. But I didn’t mean to be” (TGOW 22). Casy’s hypocrisy can be associated with the reasons for which Steinbeck denounces Christianity.

Despite the fact that Christians believe they will go to heaven after death, Casy, though a preacher, does not know where he is going. He even says that a dog is better than him because at least the dog knows where it is going: “A thick-furred yellow shepherd dog came trotting down the road, head low, tongue lolling and dripping [...] ‘Goin’ for him may-be. The preacher could not be thrown from his subject. ‘Goin’ some place,” he repeated. ‘That’s right, he’s goin’ someplace. Me – I don’t know where I’m goin’” (TGOW 21-22).

Another difference between Casy and Christ is that Casy used to tell lies when he was a preacher. Steinbeck presents preachers as those who tell lies in the name of the Lord. “Casy said, ‘If I was still a preacher I’d say the arm of the Lord has struck’” (TGOW 42). Even if he knows that it is not the arm of the Lord, he will say so. This phenomenon can be seen in many societies where people say “the Lord has told me this” and in the name of the Lord, a lot of harm is done. Some so-called men of God kill physically and emotionally or rob in the name of the Lord.

Moreover, a striking difference between Casy and Christ is that Casy eventually stops his ministry. For instance, he declares: “I was a preacher, said the man seriously Reverend Jim Casy” (TGOW 20); “I ain’t a preacher no more” (TGOW 54); and “I tol’ you I ain’t a preacher no more” (TGOW 56). This reveals clearly that he has given up preaching, which Jesus Christ did not do. Jim Casy stops preaching because he notices ways in which some biblical references create differences among people. Christianity seems to make a distinction between men and women, the good and the bad, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, master and slave. Within Christianity, all human beings are not equal. The strong can have the weak as their servants because *The Holy Bible* calls upon the servants to obey their masters in all things. It was in this regard that many biblical passages were used to defend slavery, capitalism and colonialism. The Joads in this novel might be said

to be slaves to their lands, nature, and the capitalist system. The poor could not escape the exploitation of capitalism. They were prepared to accept any kind of wage the masters proposed. It is a way of saying “we are ready to suffer here on earth and rejoice after in heaven.” Frederick Douglass’ *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Douglass), James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (Baldwin), Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* (Wright) and other works deplored the fact that Christianity helped some people to infringe on the freedom of others and even facilitated the shameful practice of slavery and colonialism. Writing about the role played by Christianity in colonialism and slavery in Africa, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, a famous African writer posits:

But apart from the doctrine that poverty and the poor were blessed and would get their reward in heaven, the missionary preached the need to obey the powers [...] In this case Caesar was the colonial power to tell the Africans that politics and political agitation was a dirty game and inconsistent with the Christian faith was a very easy step [...] I say contradiction because Christianity, whose basic doctrine is love and equality between men, was integral part of that social force. (31-33)

This citation clearly substantiates the fact that many biblical passages have been used to justify slavery and colonialism.

The difference between Jim Casy and Jesus Christ can be seen from the beginning of the novel. In the novel’s opening pages, the discrepancy between Casy’s religious preaching and his sexual behavior prompted his withdrawal from society and he went to the hills in order to comprehend his true relation to the world, which led to his Emersonian sense of connection with nonhuman nature: “There was the hills, an’ there was me, an’ we wasn’t separate no more” (TGOW 88). Casy has thus found his deepest nature, the self that is connected even to nonhuman nature, and so he has taken the first vital step toward his liberation. In his way of recovering this self, Casy follows the same pattern as Emerson and Thoreau, who went to the woods “to drive life into a corner” and discovered that “not till we are lost, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations” (Thoreau 57). This is what leads Jim Casy to embrace the Oversoul or Transcendentalism, moving away from Christianity toward an inclusive vision of humanity.

When Casy notices that his religion is not helping him to be a fulfilled person who can help himself and others, he decides to forsake it and to give himself to a “New Religion.”

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Christianity teaches that men are born sinners and that, to be holy, one needs to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It teaches also that some men are good and some are bad. Casy, embracing his New Religion, came to understand that all souls that live are holy, no matter what their condition. The narrator reports that:

Casy said solemnly, this here ol' man jus' lived a life an' jus' died out of it. I don't know whether he was good or bad, but that don't matter much. He was alive, an' that's what matters. An' now he's dead, an' that don't matter. Heard a fella tell a poem one time, an' he says "All that lives is holy." Got to thinking, an' purty soon it means more than the words says. (TGOW 157)

From this perspective, the notion of "sin" is complicated by a simple valuing of humanity. According to Transcendentalism, everything is holy and there is no evil or sin in the souls of men. This is what Rod W. Horton suggests when he writes, "Since the Oversoul is by definition good, it follows that the universe is necessarily moral [...] that if the Oversoul is all powerful and at the same time good, then evil does not exist" (Horton, 121). Similarly, Jim Casy does not accept the fact that there is sin in man: "He don't believe in sin" (TGOW 342). In fact, one has to know why people fail before judging them. For instance, people may "sin" because they are in need.

The tenant farmers are obliged to cheat in order to have heavy bags of cotton so as to get better pay. The children are hungry and so have to steal in order to appease their hunger. "Cheating" and "stealing" in these situations are a result of the realities of capitalism. "[...] an' mostly it was stuff they needed an' couldn' get no other way [...] Well, they was nice fellas, ya see, then. It's need that makes all the trouble" (TGOW 422). "Scale man says you got rocks to make weight [...] sometimes you're right, the scales is crooked" (TGOW 449-450). "Huddled under sheds, lying in wet hay, the hunger and the fear bred anger. Then boys went out, not to beg, but to steal; and men went out weakly, to try to steal" (TGOW 479). It is therefore clear that people's suffering might lead them to do things just to counter the unfair mechanisms of capitalism.

As we see in the above mentioned passages, people "sin" because they are in need and nobody helps them; their needs are thus their sins: "He don' believe in sin [...] says the sin is bein' cold" (TGOW 342). Sometimes, some people's fear of sin leads them to sin. Because people are afraid to sin, they don't even talk to one another. "They did not speak to one another, they watched for sin, and their faces condemned the whole proceeding" (TGOW 370). Unfortunately, some people are so

conscious of sin that they avoid doing natural things such as resting or dancing. “Ma said, “No, not here. She’s too tar’d.” The woman looked reproachfully at Ma. “Ain’t you believers, Ma’ am?” (TGOW 231). “Well, do you think dancin’an’play-actin’ is sins an’ll make me drop the baby?” (TGOW 344). About the injustice of a system that punishes people for simple human needs and desires, Harold Bloom writes:

The novel singles out two social institutions that assure the creation of grotesques: religion and the law. Lizbeth Sandry is the major representation of grotesque created by religion. Her intolerance of dancing represents her intolerance of sex, and such intolerance displays religion’s warping influence on human instinct. She arouses Ma’s ire by warning Rosasharn, “If you got sin on you – you better watch out for that there baby.” Her religious views, importing a supernatural mandate into the realm of nature, impose on natural behavior value judgments (like “sin”) designed to thwart the normal expression of the species self. (Bloom 134)

Realizing such contradictions and complications, Casy eventually started a journey to discover the faith that could free him and make him useful to his fellow men. In the process of his journey, Casy comes to this conclusion: “No, I don’t know nobody name’ Jesus. I know a bunch of stories but I only love people” (TGOW 24).

As said earlier, when Casy was a preacher, he had “sinful” ideas, as he himself admitted: “[...] Got a lot of sinful I dears” (TGOW 20). But paradoxically, when he denied Christianity, he started doing good things for himself and for others around him. As a preacher, he was somehow selfish. I say this because he loved only Jesus and himself. It is for this reason that he would do everything (even if he harmed others) to satisfy his selfish will. But after rejecting Christianity, he said that his love was no longer for Jesus only but for his fellow man: “[...] and his voice rang with confusion. ‘I says, ‘What’s this call, this spirit?’ An’ I says, ‘It’s love. I love people so much I’m fit to bust, sometimes.’ An’ I says, ‘Don’t you love Jesus?’ Well, I thought an’ thought, an’ finally I says, ‘No, I don’t know nobody name’ Jesus. I know a bunch of stories but I only love people.’” (TGOW 24). His belief is now translated into his love for his fellow men.

Casy’s new belief makes him think that there is no difference between men, as opposed to what the Christian religion teaches: that some people are sinners and others are holy. He believes that all souls are the same. All human beings have one big soul. He knows this belief is against the Christian dogma:

Anyways, I’ll tell you one more thing I thought out; an’ from a preacher it’s the most unreligious thing, and I can’t be a preacher no more because I thought it an’ I believe it.

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What's that?" Joad asked.

Casy looked shyly at him. "If it hits you wrong, don't take no offense at it, will you?" [...]

"I figgered about the Holy Spirit and the Jesus road. I figgered, "Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe, I figgered, "maybe, it's all men an'all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Spirit --- the human spirit -- the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul lever' body's a part of. (TGOW 24)

When he was a preacher, it was as if he was in prison and he needed to be freed. That is what Paul McCarthy states: "The preacher comes from another prison--that of his earlier Christian fundamentalism with its undercurrents of sexuality. Putting behind him both fundamentalism and sexuality, Jim is ready for a new life. He is honest, compassionate, and courageously dedicated to helping people like the Joads" (McCarthy 75).

Evidence of his new attitude is revealed in his new way of praying. He is no more praying in a Christ-like manner, but he is rather making "Emersonian Prayer" after Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the prime movers of Transcendentalism. Paul MacCarthy explained that, "As everyone gathers around the grave, all listen to Jim Casy's Emersonian prayer" (McCarthy 80). In a nutshell, Casy was immoral as a preacher but after denying Christianity he became a moralistic sound person. Steinbeck wants therefore to show, through the life of Jim Casy, his disapproval of the Christian religion and approval of the sense of commonality expressed through Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalists maintain that man possesses ideas that come not through the five senses, or the powers of reasoning, but are rather the result of direct revelation from God, His immediate inspiration, or His immanent presence in the spiritual world. They assert also that man has something besides the carnal body, a spiritual body, with senses to perceive what is true and right and beautiful, and with a natural love for such things. They also believe that nature is the great object through which man can learn spiritual lessons. Man does not need any sacred book (like the *Holy Bible* for the Christians) to learn ethics or good manners. Everything man needs to know is in him and in his interaction with nature because God is omnipresent in nature. Road W. Horton, in his book *The Background of American Literary Thought*, writes:

[...] As formulated by Emerson, it became a trumpet call to action, exhorting young men to slough off their deadening enslavement to the past, to follow the

God within, and to live every moment of life with a strenuousness that rivalled that of the puritan fathers. At the same time he insisted on the moral nature of universe, and pointed to nature as the great object lesson proving God's presence everywhere [...] (Horton)

Emerson showed through writings such as *Nature* (1836) that nature offers to man everything that he needs for his fulfilment and enlightenment, which he interprets by his intuition. Writing about Emerson, Kathryn V Sprancker affirms, "Although many accused him of subverting Christianity, he explained that, for him 'to be a good minister, it was necessary to leave the church.' [In] the address he delivered in 1838 [...] Emerson accused the church of acting 'as if God were dead' and of emphasizing dogma while stifling the spirit" (Sprancker 28). This is exactly the same thing Jim Casy does in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In order for him to become an effective minister, he forsakes the Church and gives himself to another religion, Transcendentalism.

According to Transcendentalism, all souls of human beings form one soul, what the transcendentalists call the "Oversoul." All souls are united. There is no discrimination between the souls of men. There are no good or bad souls. Jim Casy's belief in the unity of all souls led him to love people in such a way that he will do everything he can to help them. When he was a Christian, he only loved himself; he was therefore selfish. But after denying Christianity, he started loving people:

Casy spoke again, and his voice rang with pain and confusion. "I says, what's this call, this spirit? An'I says, it's love. I love people so much. I'm fit to bust, sometimes. An'I says, "Don't know well, I thought an' thought, an' finally I says "No", I don't know nobody name Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people. (TGOW 24).

The discovery of the Oversoul by Casy is exemplified in these words of Steinbeck: "[...] an'I can remember – all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an'he foun' he didn't have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of great big soul. Wasn't any good'less it was with the rest, an'was whole" (TGOW 462).

Through this, the reader understands that Casy is enlightened by a new belief in the Oversoul. He eventually forgets about himself and everything he would say or do is always on behalf of others. He changes from the selfish "I" synonymous with

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capitalism – personal interest - into the love and concern of others’ “We.” The narrator reflects on these new beliefs:

This is zygote. For here “I lost my land” is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate - “we lost our land”. The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first “we” there grows a still more dangerous thing: “I have a little food” plus “I have none”. If from this problem the sum is “we have a little food”, the thing is on its way, the movement has direction [...] this is the beginning – from “I” to “We”. (TGOW 165).

Casy’s love is materialized on many occasions in the novel. Whenever he finds an opportunity to show his love, he never hesitates to do so. When the deputy was trying to hurt Floyd, Jim Casy rescued him. “The deputy, sitting on the ground, raised his gun again and then, suddenly, from the group of men, the reverend Casy stepped. He kicked the deputy in the neck and then stood back as the heavy man crumpled into unconsciousness” (TGOW 292).

Inspired by his love for people in general and for the Joads in particular, Casy takes the blame for Tom Joad’s crime and goes to prison on his behalf, because Tom is on parole and if he goes to prison again, this will be a great problem for him and for his family.

Casy moved close to Tom. “You got to got out”, he said. “You go down in the willas an’ wait. He didn’t see me kick’im, but he seen you stick out your foot.”  
“I don’t want to go” Tom said  
Casy put his head close. He whispered, “They’ll finger print you. You broke parole. They’ll send you back” [...] Tom strolled away casually [...] Tires squealed on the highway and an open can came swiftly into the camp. Four men, armed with rifles, piled out. Casy stood up and walked to them.  
“What the hell’s goin’ on her?”  
Casy said, “I knocked out you man there” [...]  
“Get in that car”  
“Sure” said Casy, and he climbed into the back seat and sat down. (TGOW 293-294)

Still, because of his love for the people, when Jim Casy was released from prison, he was again ready to help them, even if it cost him his life. Jim tells Tom about his experience in prison and reports that he now works to organize the migrant farmers. He explains that the owner of the peach orchards cut wages to two-and-a-half cents per box, which is why the men went on strike, and now the owner has hired a new group of men in hope of breaking the strike. This results from capitalism



whereby only personal interest counts. No matter the ways used, only the result matters. This might be why Steinbeck subtly attacks this system by having Casy go through his religious journey. Casy predicts that by the following day, the strike-breakers will be making only two-and-a-half cents per box. He is accused by policemen of leading the strike and being a Communist. As Casy protests that the owners are only helping to starve children, one of them crushes his skull with a pick handle. Casy died helping the poor to gain their rights, and fighting for the common good. He was able to sacrifice himself, thanks to beliefs embodied in his “New Religion”:

God-awful tar'd. I knowed a fella Brang'im in while I was in the jail house. Been tryin'to start a union [...] Casy said softly, “All of'em's itchy. Them Corps been sayin'how they figger I'm a leader'cause I talk so much.” [...] Casy stared blindly at the light. He breathed heavily. “Listen”, he said. “You fellas don'tknow what you're doin'. You're helpin'to starve kids.”  
“Shut up, you red son-of-a-bitch”.

A short heavy man stepped into the light. He carried a new white pick handle. Casy went on, “You don't know what you're a-doin'”  
The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crashed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone and Casy fell sideways out of the light.  
“Jesus, George. I thing you killed him.” (TGOW 424 - 426)

Consequently, Steinbeck proposes Transcendentalism as the religion that can help the poor overcome the horrors of the capitalist system. Casy is the holder of the beliefs of Transcendentalism. He suffers for others until he dies because he believes all the souls of human beings are united, forming the “Oversoul.” Though Steinbeck seems to prefer Transcendentalism to Christianity, I think both Christianity and Transcendentalism are good provided that there is no fanaticism. Christianity is helpful for the development of a society because it urges everybody to hard work and to be serious in their work. But Christianity can in some cases be a hindrance because its believers can become individualistic and selfish if they misinterpret the teaching of hard work. Transcendentalism is also helpful because it teaches the essential unity of all creation. And, because of these beliefs, there is the search for the common good. The rich will care for the poor, and there will no more be discrimination at any level. But Transcendentalism can hinder the progress of society if people misinterpret its principles because people may become lazy. Some people might say, “even if we do not work, we will get something to eat.” These attitudes cannot contribute to the prosperity of societies.

## Komi BEGEDOU

### CONCLUSION

Perhaps what Steinbeck's work leads us to consider is a need for combining Christian and Transcendental principles in order to achieve the effective happiness of men and of societies. I say this because both Christianity and Transcendentalism promote virtues such as hard work, love, and the search for the common good necessary for the development of the society. Expressing a similar point of view, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writes:

I believe the church could return to (or learn lessons from) the primitive communism of the early Christian church of Peter and also the Communalism of the traditional African society. With this, and working in alliance with the socialist aspirations of the African masses, we might build a new society to create a new man freed from greed and competitive hatred, and ready to realize his full potential [...] (36)

It is therefore important to combine the two religions. If in a society, all can work seriously to earn the profit for themselves and at the same time can be striving for the common good, such a society cannot but prosper. Religion will no more be the opium of the people.

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