

Victorian Family Dynamics in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

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Abstract

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a seminal work of the Modern Period, is frequently analyzed for its depiction of economic adversity during the Great Depression. This study, however, redirects attention to the familial dynamics of the Joad family, examining how their relationships and duties reflect Victorian family ideals. Although set in 1930s America, *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts a family structure grounded on ideals like duty, sacrifice, patriarchal authority, and the sanctity of familial bonds—characteristics linked to the Victorian era. This article analyzes Steinbeck's depiction of the evolving family responsibilities throughout westward migration, focusing on the durability and adaptation of the family unit amidst severe social and economic challenges. The Joads' journey is a tale of survival and evolution, whereby conventional Victorian familial attributes—such as the significance of motherhood, communal devotion, and the ethical duty to support one another—are challenged and, in certain instances, reinvented. Ma Joad receives particular focus as she embodies a matriarchal position that both challenges and enhances the Victorian paradigm of domestic rule. This essay contextualizes *The Grapes of Wrath* within Victorian ideals to demonstrate how Steinbeck's work transcends its historical context, engaging with broader and more enduring themes of familial togetherness, resilience, and moral obligation. The story ultimately illustrates that the resilience of the family unit, despite evolving gender roles and economic deterioration, reflects the enduring nature of Victorian family ideals during periods of crisis.

Keywords: Family dynamics, Victorian ideals, John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Resilience

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John Steinbeck'in The Grapes of Wrath Romanındaki Viktorya Çağı Aile Dinamikleri

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Öz

John Steinbeck'in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) adlı eseri, Modern Dönem'in önemli yapıtlarından biri olarak sıklıkla Büyük Buhran dönemindeki ekonomik zorlukların tasviri açısından incelenmektedir. Bu çalışma ise odağını değiştirerek Joad ailesinin ailevi dinamiklerine yönelmekte ve onların ilişkilerinin ve sorumluluklarının Viktorya dönemi aile ideallerini nasıl yansıttığını incelemektedir. 1930'lar Amerikas'ında geçmesine rağmen *The Grapes of Wrath*, görev, fedakârlık, ataerkil otorite ve aile bağlarının kutsallığı gibi Viktorya dönemiyle ilişkilendirilen değerlere dayanan bir aile yapısını ortaya koyar. Bu makale, Steinbeck'in batıya göç süreci boyunca değişen ailevi sorumlulukları nasıl tasvir ettiğini analiz ederek, ağır sosyal ve ekonomik zorluklar karşısında aile biriminin dayanıklılığına ve uyum yetisine odaklanır. Joad ailesinin yolculuğu, hem bir hayatta kalma hem de dönüşüm hikâyesidir; bu süreçte Viktorya dönemine özgü anneliğin önemi, topluluğa bağlılık ve birbirine destek olma gibi geleneksel aile değerleri sınanır ve bazı durumlarda yeniden şekillenir. Ma Joad karakterine özellikle vurgu yapılır; çünkü o, Viktorya dönemi ev içi otorite anlayışını hem sorgulayan hem de pekiştiren anaerkil bir rol üstlenir. Bu makale, *The Grapes of Wrath*'ı Viktorya dönemi idealleri çerçevesinde ele alarak, Steinbeck'in eserinin tarihsel bağlamını aşarak daha geniş ve kalıcı bir şekilde aile bütünlüğü, dayanıklılık ve ahlaki sorumluluk temalarıyla nasıl ilişki kurduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak hikâye, değişen toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ve ekonomik gerilemeye rağmen, aile biriminin dayanıklılığının kriz dönemlerinde Viktorya aile ideallerinin kalıcılığını yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile dinamikleri, Viktorya idealleri, John Steinbeck, Gazap Üzümleri, Dayanıklılık

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Introduction

Strict gender roles and a pronounced emphasis on patriarchal power defined Victorian family dynamics. The family was regarded as a moral entity, with the father serving as the leader and principal provider, while the mother was anticipated to embody domestic virtues and nurture the offspring (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). Victorian families emphasized responsibility, obedience, and respectability, frequently perceiving marriage and parenthood as social obligations rather than individual preferences. This framework was essential for upholding social order and sustaining class divisions in Victorian society (Poole, 2014). The moral and economic roles of the family were interconnected, with women personifying the "angel in the house" ideal to preserve the sanctity of the home. This idealized paradigm frequently strained both genders emotionally, resulting in underlying conflicts within the purportedly "ideal" family unit.

Even though the Joad family in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is depicted as coping with the hard realities of the Great Depression, many of the family interactions resemble the ideals of the Victorian era. In a manner that is reminiscent of Victorian households, the Joads are first organized around patriarchal power. Pa Joad serves as the nominal head of the household and is a representation of the conventional male character who is responsible for guiding the family's destiny. According to Davidoff and Hall (1987), this is a reflection of the Victorian paradigm, in which the position of the father was strongly tied with the provision of economic resources and that of social leadership. However, as the family's journey toward the West progresses and they encounter increasingly difficult circumstances, it becomes clear that Pa Joad's authority is beginning to erode. Ma Joad progressively develops a leadership role as a response to this, taking control of important decisions and becoming the emotional anchor of the family. Her acts are reminiscent of the Victorian stereotype of the "angel in the house," which represents compassion, moral fortitude, and household stability. However, she goes beyond this archetype by assuming a position of decisive and pragmatic authority in the family's survival plan. Important Victorian values such as duty, sacrifice, and familial devotion are brought to light in the work. These values serve as the foundation for the Joad family's efforts to maintain their unity despite the persistent dangers of poverty, dislocation, and social fragmentation the family faces. Even though the family is confronted with the dissolution of conventional institutions, the commitment to collective survival reflects Victorian ideas of the family as a moral and supportive entity (Poole, 2014). Through the utilization of this dynamic, Steinbeck can condemn the constraints that are imposed on families during times of economic crisis as well as the

limits that are associated with conventional gender standards, while simultaneously admiring the enduring power of familial relationships. *The Grapes of Wrath* serves as a contemporary narrative that is profoundly interwoven with earlier, Victorian family ideals. This is accomplished through the sufferings of the Joad family, which are reinterpreted within the context of the socio-economic reality of 1930s America.

1. The Family Dynamics in the Victorian Era

The Victorian era was characterized by strict social class hierarchies that profoundly influenced family dynamics. The middle class emerged as a dominant social force, shaping family structures and relationships while often emphasizing respectability and moral values (Thompson, 1988). This class distinction created a framework wherein family roles were clearly defined, with expectations firmly aligned to prevailing social ideals. Middle-class families often adhered to norms associated with domesticity and paternal authority, where the father was expected to be the family's provider and the moral guide of the home, while the mother was typically relegated to the role of caregiver and moral educator for the children. This delineation of roles was crucial for establishing a family identity that valued property and social position, reinforcing individual identities that conformed to these expectations (Martin, 1990).

Conversely, the economic challenges faced by the working class significantly impacted family relationships, leading to a different set of dynamics. Poverty necessitated a more pragmatic approach to family interactions, where survival often dictated priorities and cooperation among family members. Bailey (1979) illustrates that in many working-class homes, the contributions of all family members were essential for economic support, promoting a more collectively oriented family structure.

The need for shared work often resulted in traditional gender roles, as women and children were compelled to contribute economically, thus redefining their identities within the family unit (Woolf, 2002).

E. Gordon et al. (2003) argue that significant distinctions in social classes created contrasting family expectations, ultimately shaping individual identities within family units. For the middle class, family dynamics were based on adherence to social norms and expectations, leading to relationships that were often characterized by a performative nature, where love and affection were intertwined with social appearances and moral obligations. In contrast, working-class families experienced dynamic relationships formed by practicality rather than social pressure, often resulting in closer interpersonal ties forged through shared struggles and resistance. This divergence in family dynamics

reflects broader socio-economic realities and clarifies how class distinctions created divergent paths for individual identity formation.

Additionally, gender roles during this era reinforced these dynamics by incorporating economic dependence into the family structure. It was generally expected that women in middle-class families would cultivate domestic skills and uphold the moral fabric of their homes; this social expectation positioned them as guardians of virtue and social propriety (Perkins, 1994). In contrast, working-class women often faced dual responsibilities of home management and wage-earning, leading to a complex negotiation of their identities within the family unit. According to Thorne (1993), this duality allowed for a more fluid expression of gender roles, although it simultaneously reflected and perpetuated systemic inequalities.

Therefore, the interaction of social class, gender roles, and economic factors during the Victorian era intricately influenced family dynamics, shaping not only relations within families but also the broader social narratives surrounding individual identities. The structured expectations of the middle class contrasted sharply with the pragmatic adaptations of the working class, revealing the profound impact of socioeconomic conditions on family interactions and identity formation. Gender roles in the Victorian era played a fundamental role in shaping family dynamics, with men generally occupying the role of provider while women were relegated to domestic spheres. The concept of "separate spheres" outlined a clear boundary between male public life and female private life, which deeply influenced family interactions (Tosh, 2008). This delineation not only dictated the expectations placed upon

individuals but also served as a critical framework through which family relationships were understood and navigated. Men, as the primary breadwinners, were expected to exercise authority and provide financial security, establishing their status as heads of households. In contrast, women were tasked with creating nurturing environments, reinforcing their roles as caregivers and upholders of moral standards within the family unit (Cameron, 1990).

Smith-Rosenberg (1986) posits that these gender roles were not merely social constructs but were deeply intertwined with family expectations and individual identities. For women, the pressure to conform to domestic ideals created a complex interaction between identity and duty, often leading to a sense of satisfaction derived from their roles, despite the limitations placed upon them. Mothers, in particular, were viewed as the moral compasses for their children, shaping behavior and instilling social values that would ultimately forge the identities of the next generation. This maternal influence was

enshrined in the ideology of domesticity, which continued to pervade the cultural narratives of the time (Langland, 1995).

A rigid adherence to these gender norms not only affected personal identities but also influenced family relationships in nuanced ways. Parents exercised authority stemming from their economic control, while mothers often wielded their influence through emotional support and the cultivation of family ties. This dynamic frequently led to a tense relationship between husbands and wives, as their respective roles often restricted collaborative decision-making and mutual respect, patterns well-documented in historical accounts of marital discord (Contz, 2005). Furthermore, the positioning of children within this dynamic reflected broader social attitudes toward gender and class; typically, boys were prepared for public life and leadership roles, while girls were groomed for domesticity, resulting in differentiated experiences that shaped their perceptions and self-esteem (Walkowitz, 1992).

In addition, the intersection of economic factors within these gender roles cannot be underestimated. Economic stability for families depended on men's participation in the labor market, which in turn dictated their roles within the family structure. The emergence of the middle class during the Victorian era intensified these divisions, as economic prosperity solidified different gender roles (Nayak, 2003). However, in the lowest socioeconomic strata, women often joined the workforce out of necessity, challenging the dominant notions of femininity and motherhood. This phenomenon, as Koven (1990) pointed out, highlights the varying family dynamics based on class, revealing that the so-called Victorian family "ideal" was not universally attainable.

The interaction of social class and gender roles further complicated family dynamics, generating an environment where individual identities were built through both compliance and resistance to these social expectations. The Victorian family, therefore, was a site of negotiation, a space where the ideologies of domesticity and the separate spheres were perpetuated while being simultaneously contested, as family members sought to forge their identities within the confines of the prescribed gender roles. Economic factors played a fundamental role in shaping family dynamics during the Victorian era, acting as a catalyst that transformed social interactions and individual identities within the family structure. The transition to industrialization marked a significant change in labor opportunities; however, the working class also faced forms of economic exploitation that fundamentally altered established family roles (Cominos, 1963). Traditional family hierarchies, typically characterized by paternal authority and domesticity defined by women's roles at home, began to deteriorate under economic pressures that forced changes in these dynamics. This economic transition not only

changed how families operated externally within society but also significantly affected their internal relationships and identities.

Phegley (2004) argues that these economic changes contributed to a closer examination of marital relations and parenting practices, with financial stability emerging as a key determinant of family identity. The traditional vision of marriage, often rooted in social stability and economic security, faced challenges as the working class dealt with the volatility of industrial jobs. Many married couples experienced tension as work demands led to altered family routines and expectations, complicating the roles of men and women. This tension was particularly pronounced when women began entering the workforce in greater numbers, despite social norms dictating that their main role was as caregivers and housewives.

Moreover, the impact of economic factors extended to the nature of courtship and marriage agreements. May (1983) illustrates how economic stability influenced marriage trends, identifying a direct correlation between financial resources and the likelihood of prolonged marriages versus increases in divorce rates. In a society where financial security was becoming increasingly elusive, the contractual nature of marriage shifted, prompting family units to reassess their identities in light of these economic realities. Anxieties surrounding financial stress could, in many cases, exacerbate tensions within the family, leading to redefined roles for both men and women, often dictated by necessity rather than cultural ideals.

The interdependence of economic stability and family coherence underscores how essential financial considerations have become to individual identities in the Victorian family structure. In some instances, economic pressures prompted changes in gender roles, where men were expected to fulfill dual roles as providers and caregivers, while women took on responsibilities outside the domestic sphere to support their families. This evolution required both genders to negotiate their identities within these newly formed dynamics, creating a nuanced understanding of family that transcended rigid class classifications.

In addition, economic challenges not only affected the immediate family unit but also had broader implications for the broader social fabric. Families of different social classes experienced these economic changes to various degrees, thus accentuating social stratifications and individual identities. The fights of the families of the working class often resulted in United Community Units, since survival required collective ingenuity, while middle and high-class families contained their forms of identity crisis rooted in maintaining social expectations in the context of changing economic landscapes.

In summary, economic factors undoubtedly influenced family dynamics during the Victorian era, shaping individual relations and identities through the interaction of class, gender, and financial imperatives. As families adapted to these pressures, the traditional narratives of family life became increasingly complex, which demonstrates the deep interrelation of economic realities with social structure and personal identity within the family context. The intersection of social class, gender roles, and economic factors during the Victorian era provides a crucial lens through which to analyze the family dynamics of the time. The investigation has shown that the structure of the Victorian family depended largely on the socio-economic status, which in turn influenced the roles and expectations of people within the family unit. For example, Bock (1996) examines how middle-class families often adhered to a patriarchal model, in which men served as the main supports and women were relegated to the domestic sphere.

This role configuration not only outlined clear power hierarchies within the home but also reinforced the social norms surrounding masculinity and femininity. The adoption of these roles shaped individual identities, and men were expected to embody the ideals of strength and provision, while women were idealized as guardians and moral caregivers.

On the contrary, in the families of the working class, the economic need often blurred the lines of traditional gender roles. As Smith (2011) pointed out, many working-class women contributed to the entry of the home through paid work, which often led to a more egalitarian division of work within the domestic sphere. This phenomenon underlines the variability of family dynamics, where economic imperatives issued a deviation from strict adherence to class roles based on class, promoting unique relational frameworks that challenged the predominant norms adopted by their middle-class counterparts.

In addition, the impact of economic conditions on family structures cannot be exaggerated. The economy and the subsequent recessions of the Victorian era created changing dynamics that affected family relationships. Roper's research (2010) illustrates that economic difficulties, exemplified through events such as the great depression of the 1870s, forced families to reassess their relationships and often required a community approach between extended family members. This reconceptualization of family dynamics allowed resilience and adaptation since families were forced to navigate the challenges of poverty and instability. Such changes highlighted the fluidity of family identity since relations were dynamically built depending on external economic pressures.

In addition, academics like Gordon et al. (2003) emphasize that the rigid class structures of the time provided a backdrop against which family relationships were not only developed but also disputed. Victorian emphasis on moral property within family life,

particularly among the middle classes, often led to tensions and conflicts about personal desires and social expectations. This dissonance is particularly evident in the stories surrounding the domesticity and cult of true femininity, which were fundamental to producing the ideal of the submissive and enriching mother. However, the experiences of many women diverged from this ideal, fracturing the assumed sewing of Victorian family models and reflecting a spectrum of individual identities.

It is indicated that the interaction of social class, gender roles, and economic factors in the Victorian era cultivated a nuanced and often paradoxical panorama of family dynamics. As Articula Morgan (2007), understanding these complex interrelations not only provides information about the Victorian family, but also offers valuable perspectives on contemporary family structures and continuous identity negotiations within the family context. The Victorian era, therefore, arises as a critical period of conformity and deviation from the established social norms, shaping its implications for future generations.

2. The Representation of the Family Dynamics in the Novel *The Grapes of Wrath*

The Joad family, tenant farmers who were uprooted from their Oklahoma home during the Great Depression, is the subject of *The Grapes of Wrath*. (Steinbeck, 1998). The family sets out on a challenging journey westward to California in quest of employment and stability after experiencing poverty and environmental destruction as a result of the Dust Bowl. They come into personal tragedies, animosity, and exploitation along the route. Ma Joad emerges as the family's moral and emotional leader as the Joads work to maintain their humanity and unity in the face of these difficulties. Steinbeck's book is a potent critique of the social and economic structures of 1930s America because it examines themes of injustice, resiliency, social unfairness, and the strength of group effort. The novel encapsulates the essence of the human connection in the midst of social revolt, reflecting multifaceted interactions and emotional responses within the Joad family. As they face the frightening challenges of displacement and economic deprivation, the identity and role of each member evolve, highlighting the deep impact of their collective struggles.

The notion of identity between the Joads is intrinsically linked to the themes of adversity and resilience. Hooti and Arjmand (2013) claim that the identities of the characters are not static but continuously shaped by their experiences. For example, Tom Joad, once an individual driven by personal aspirations, becomes a social responsibility figure by

recognizing the interconnectivity of human suffering and community resilience. This transformation reflects a fundamental complexity in family dynamics, revealing how adversity obliges individuals to reevaluate their roles and responsibilities to each other.

The family journey also reveals the tension between individualism and collectivism, a struggle that is usually exacerbated by external pressures. Murphy (2013) explores this dichotomy through the notion of the American dream, presenting it as a distorted ideal that bonds and isolates the Joads. While chasing this dream, the family deals with the harsh realities of survival, leading them to trust each other. Steinbeck's portrait of his interdependence illustrates pungently how relationships can be tense and reinforced by adversity.

In addition, the visual style and thematic emphasis of the novel further increase the exploitation of family dynamics. Sobchack (1979) discusses how Steinbeck employs film techniques to broaden the emotional weight of family interactions. The use of vivid images and symbolism encapsulates the turbulence experienced by the Joads, emphasizing their resilience in the face of tireless difficulties. Sobchack (2017) reiterates that these visual clues serve to improve the thematic depth of the collective struggle of the Joads, presenting their family ties as a source of force that triumphs over the external adversities they find.

Dillman (1992) contextualizes the aspects of the development of the characters in the narrative structure of the novel. He points out that as the Joads move from their pastoral home in Oklahoma to the uncertain landscapes of California, their family relationships undergo significant transformations. Each interaction reflects a development response to socioeconomic challenges, illustrating how adversity requires adaptations that ultimately strengthen relational dynamics.

The complexities of family dynamics in the novel are intrinsically intertwined with adversity, resilience, and identity themes. While the Joad family sails on their tumultuous journey, the evolutionary role of each member illustrates the deep effects of their shared struggle on family relationships. The interaction of individual and collective resilience serves as proof of the lasting power of family ties in the face of relentless challenges. By examining these dynamics in the context of adversity, Steinbeck not only creates a rich narrative but also offers a moving comment on the human condition, echoing the struggles of countless families throughout history. Various quotations in the novel can be given as an example of Victorian family dynamics.

In Victorian society the notion of patriarchal authority is seen as the emotional and moral anchor of the family. The survival and stability of the family depend on the father's emotional resilience, echoing Victorian values of male stoicism and leadership in times of

crisis. In Victorian households, the father's calmness and composure were essential in providing both economic security and emotional stability. "The women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break... Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole" (Steinbeck, 1998, p. 4). Similarly, Steinbeck's portrayal of the Joad men, especially Pa Joad, emphasizes the expectation that the father should remain strong and composed despite external adversities such as drought, poverty, and displacement. The silent endurance displayed by Pa Joad in this scene mirrors the Victorian ideal of the self-sacrificing patriarch who suppresses personal fears for the sake of family cohesion. However, Steinbeck subtly introduces the fragility of this dynamic, as the crisis exposes cracks in the father's authority, prompting Ma Joad's increasing influence in guiding the family's emotional and practical decisions.

Ma Joad embodies the Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house," symbolizing moral fortitude and maternal authority. She is portrayed as the emotional core of the Joad family, reflecting the Victorian belief that women were the moral guardians of the household, responsible for nurturing, caregiving, and ensuring the moral well-being of the family. "She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken" (Steinbeck, 1998, p. 74). However, Steinbeck deepens this portrayal by showing how Ma Joad's role transcends passive caregiving as she becomes the family's de facto leader when the traditional patriarchal structure begins to falter. While Victorian domestic ideals positioned women as quiet supporters behind their husbands, Ma Joad actively asserts authority, makes decisions and stabilizes the family during their migration and hardship. Her strength is not merely emotional but also logistical and strategic, ensuring that the family stays unified in the face of displacement, hunger, and loss. In doing so, Steinbeck both affirms and redefines the Victorian archetype, presenting Ma as both the traditional maternal figure and a resilient leader under crisis conditions.

In Victorian society, family members—especially women—were expected to put the needs of the household above personal desires, promoting unity, endurance, and moral responsibility. "Use' ta be the fambly was fust. It ain't so now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (Steinbeck, 1998, p. 193). The Joads' worldview evolves under the extreme hardships of the Great Depression. Initially focused on maintaining their own nuclear family, they gradually extend their sense of duty to a wider community of fellow migrants who share similar struggles. This shift mirrors the Victorian belief in the importance of charity and collective moral obligation, where sacrifice and care extend beyond the home. Steinbeck highlights how the Joads, particularly through Ma Joad and

Tom Joad, come to embody these values by supporting others, sharing resources, and maintaining a deep commitment to human dignity. In this way, Steinbeck modernizes the Victorian ideal, showing how acts of selflessness and familial sacrifice become survival mechanisms that bind marginalized communities together during times of social collapse.

In Victorian ideology, the hearth was the sacred domestic center where the family gathered for comfort, stability, and moral instruction. Steinbeck adapts this symbol to the harsh realities of the Joads' migration by transforming the family's old Hudson truck into a mobile hearth. As their home and land are rendered lifeless and abandoned, the truck becomes the new nucleus of the family's unity and survival. "The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. The ancient Hudson... was the new hearth, the living center of the family" (Steinbeck, 1998, p. 100). The truck not only transports the Joads physically but also holds them together emotionally, offering a shared space where decisions are made, relationships are maintained, and hope is kept alive. This echoes the Victorian ideal of the home as a place of refuge and cohesion, yet Steinbeck modernizes the concept by placing it within a transient and precarious setting. The mobile hearth reflects how, even amid economic displacement and environmental ruin, the family strives to maintain its internal bonds and moral center. The truck, much like the Victorian household, becomes the anchor that keeps the Joad family resilient against external forces of instability and loss.

This reflects a broader erosion of rigid Victorian gender roles under the pressures of poverty and migration. In Victorian society, the wife and mother typically acted as the silent supporter behind the patriarch, reinforcing family cohesion without overtly challenging male dominance. Yet here, Ma's role evolves as she emerges as the emotional anchor and practical authority figure within the family, especially when Pa's leadership begins to waver under hardship. The children's instinctive response suggests their awareness of this transition, indicating a natural shift toward matriarchal strength and security. "Pa was the head of the family now. Ma stood behind him... Now Ruthie and Winfield... felt the change, and they slowed up and moved quietly to stand with Ma" (Steinbeck, 1998, p. 139). This passage highlights the initial preservation of patriarchal authority within the Joad family, with Pa Joad positioned as the head, aligning with the Victorian family model where the father held primary decision-making power and moral leadership. However, Steinbeck subtly illustrates the shifting dynamics beneath this traditional structure. While Pa remains the nominal leader, the quiet but growing influence of Ma Joad becomes apparent, especially in the way the children, Ruthie and Winfield, instinctively gravitate toward her. This reflects a broader erosion of rigid Victorian gender roles under the pressures of poverty and migration. Steinbeck uses this

moment to foreshadow Ma's eventual assumption of leadership, illustrating how crisis reconfigures familial roles beyond the traditional Victorian framework.

3. Conclusion

In the 1930s American setting of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the persistence and change of Victorian family relationships are shown strongly. At first, Steinbeck's picture of the Joad family fits with traditional Victorian ideals of patriarchal authority, selflessness, and domesticity. However, as the story goes on, it shows how these values change as the family faces social and economic problems. As the Joads deal with poverty, moving, and grave threats, the family's structure changes. Ma Joad emerges as a matriarchal figure, which goes against the strict gender norms of the time. This change is a reflection of larger changes in family roles during times of crisis when staying alive often requires flexibility and redefining standard roles (Hager, 2010).

In addition, the book stresses the importance of moral responsibility and group strength. These ideas are similar to Victorian ideas about family duty and right and wrong, but Steinbeck adds solidarity with the larger immigrant community. This growth turns the family into a sign of social unity, similar to how hard times during the Great Depression made people feel like they needed to stick together. Others, like Kaplan (1995), say that Steinbeck's picture is both an adaptation of Victorian family ideals and a critique of how these ideals can become unworkable when there is institutional injustice and the economy crashes. The Joads' growing understanding of other families' plight and their shared battle with them point to a more developed Victorian moral code that includes the community as a whole as well as the nuclear family.

Furthermore, Steinbeck's story shows how crises can change the way genders interact with power, highlighting the complexity of this relationship. Jaffe (1999) says that literature from times of disaster often shows and changes gender norms. For example, Ma Joad's rise to become the family's moral and practical leader shows how this can happen. This shows a change from rigidly patriarchal families to more equal ones. This trend has also been seen in research about working-class families in both the Victorian era and the present day (Davies, 2012). Steinbeck shows through Ma Joad's guidance and the Joads' overall strength that everyone needs to share responsibility to get through hard times. This is a theme that goes beyond the book's historical setting.

The Grapes of Wrath goes beyond its historical setting by telling a story that reinterprets Victorian family relationships in light of the social and economic conditions of the 20th

century. Steinbeck's focus on gender fluidity and collective survival tactics adds depth to the Victorian ideas that are still around, especially those about duty, sacrifice, and family unity. Mitchell (2005) says that Steinbeck's picture of the Joads is both a tribute to how strong traditional family values are and a critical look at how they can fall short. The Grapes of Wrath is a timeless look at family identity, strength, and moral duty because it takes two different approaches. The book tells readers that even though family structures are affected by social and historical factors, their core values of kindness, cooperation, and strength remain important for people to survive and live with honor throughout generatio.

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