

The Grapes of Wrath: A Retrospect on the Folkish Expression of Justice in Popular Culture and Family

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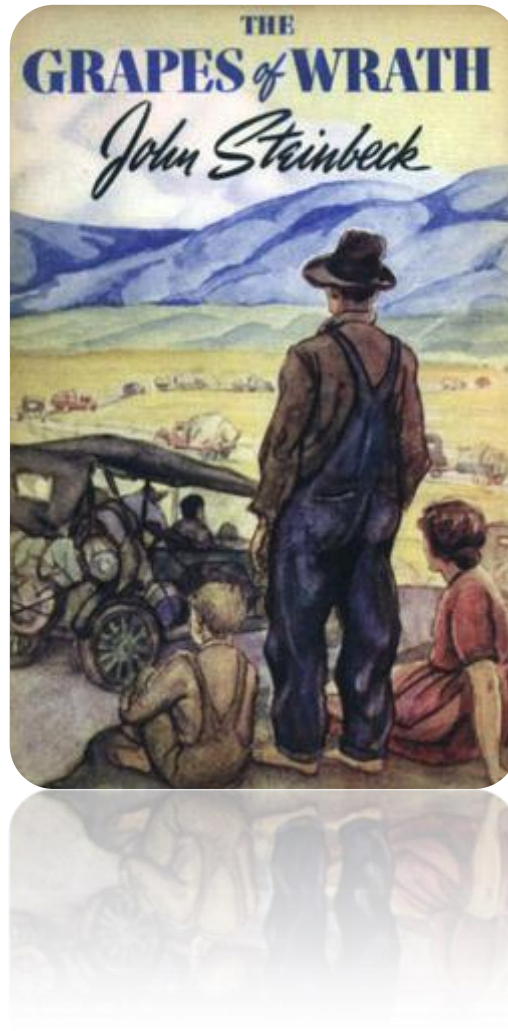


Figure 1: Cover of 'The Grapes of Wrath' by John Steinbeck, 1902-1968, By New York: Viking - image, page, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5177527>

The Grapes of Wrath: A Popular Culture Retrospect

INTRODUCTION

The story of rural folk migrating in times of poverty and social injustice seeped well into my childhood history, through three popular cultural forms of entertainment:- several television series in the 1960s, a series of comedy films from the late 1940s and 1950s, and a novel published in 1939 with a classic Hollywood movie the following year. There was in my own family history points of connection to the longer story, which I would only find out many years later. The story told here will move backwards in time, and the historical settings are different; that is the particular point I am making. Different histories are linked by a common theme, and in this case, we are considering the folkish expression on social justice. Retrospectively, we can also see how popular entertainment works to thin-out the social justice message. What starts as a serious educative process of informing the public on important social justice issues, in the end, becomes a mocking and light reflection on life-changing questions. By going backwards, we dig below the surface for the gold, rather than being satisfied in panning for the golden flakes.



Figure 2: 'Ma and Pa' Buch on the Road

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AMERICAN TELEVISION 1954-1973



Figure 3: Title screen from *The Beverly Hillbillies* By Source, Fair use,
<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15993718>

The Beverly Hillbillies was an American sitcom television series broadcast on CBS from 1962 to 1971. The Clampett family are hillbillies from the Appalachia region. The writer of the series was Paul Henning, who also created the 'country cousin' series on CBS: *Petticoat Junction* and its spin-off *Green Acres*. Since the 1970s the narrative of rural folkish wisdom against urban modernism has never had the same hold on the popular culture. The phrase 'rural purge' referred to a series of cancellations, at the end of the 1970–71 television seasons, in still-popular rural-themed shows of the American television networks (in particular CBS). The rural-themed television shows had, for the decade of the 1960s, grown into a cultural obsession. Among the globally well-known family television staples was CBS's *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968, 249 episodes spanning over eight seasons), *Mister Ed* (1961-1966, 143 episodes), and *Lassie* (1954-1973, 591 episodes over 19 seasons). Jerry Haggins of the Museum of Broadcast Communication captures the reasoning for the purge:

By the late 1960s, ... many viewers, especially young ones, were rejecting [rural-themed] shows as irrelevant to modern times. Mayberry's [fictional town of North Carolina in *The Andy Griffith Show*] total isolation from contemporary problems was

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part of its appeal, but more than a decade of media coverage of the civil rights movement had brought about a change in the popular image of the small Southern town. *Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C.*, was set on a U.S. Marine base between 1964 and 1969, but neither Gomer nor any of his fellow marines ever mentioned the war in Vietnam. CBS executives, afraid of losing the lucrative youth demographic, purged their schedule of hit shows that were drawing huge but older-skewing audiences.¹

Although the folksiness had the upper-hand, the exchange went both ways. *Petticoat Junction* (222 episodes in seven seasons) was the linchpin in this larger fictional world. The Shady Rest Hotel was located at a water stop along the isolated branch line of the C. & F.W. Railroad; the line runs between the rural farm community of Hooterville and the small town of Pixley. The main town is a reference to Pixley, California, and the main setting is thought to be somewhere in Southwest Missouri. However, it is simply a representation of old America 'small-ville' and the new American television suburbia. It is a nostalgic retreat back to folkish decent values and decision-making, but given a modern sexually-alluring twist. In Drucker's Store, menfolk come to play checkers and chat, and in a carefree environment. Widowed Kate Bradley is the hotel proprietor and is left to keep the community together. Uncle Joe Carson, when he is not in idle pastimes, frequently comes up with half-baked get-rich-quick schemes and ill-conceived hotel promotions which end up in foolish predicaments. The *Hooterville Cannonball* is a 1890s vintage steam-driven train, running as a taxi service by engineer Charley Pratt and fireman-railway conductor Floyd Smoot. Many of the episodes' storylines hark back to the nineteenth century corporate greed of the railway barons. The railroad executive Homer Bedloe continues to make futile attempts to shut down and scrap the *Hooterville Cannonball*, along with its isolated track which keeps this part of rural America connected to the rest of the country. The train stop is nicknamed 'petticoat junction' (really a water stop) because the Bradley sisters often go swimming in the railway's water tower and leave their petticoats draped over the side. Kate Bradley's three beautiful daughters – redhead Betty Jo, brunette Bobbie Jo, and blonde Billie Jo – are the modern and urban element in the tale, combining independent feminism and soft-erotic sexuality.

Hooterville is the junction in the three-way CBS world. *Green Acres* (170 episodes in six seasons) reversed the theme's direction by a plot in which a New York wealthy 'mod' couple, Oliver Wendell and Lisa Douglas, move from New York City to a country farm of the show's name. This last in the three series opens up the world of television to more characters in the Hooterville population; including Fred and Doris Ziffel with their pig 'Arnold', who are the Douglasses' childless elderly neighbours. The name 'Oliver Wendell' is

¹ Jerry Haggins, 'The Andy Griffith Show – U.S. Situation Comedy'. Museum of Broadcast Communications.

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an allusion to Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., the famous American jurist who is symbolic of the rural-urban crossover during the early twentieth century. *The Beverly Hillbillies* (274 episodes over nine seasons) was the earlier and mainstay among the three series, but crossover storylines ties all three parts of the folkish world together. Granny or Daisy May Moses, Jed Clampett's mother-in-law comes to Hooterville area to tend to Betty Jo and Steve's baby at the Shady Rest Hotel, Petticoat Junction. The Clampetts also spent Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1968 in Hooterville, and in 1970, Miss Jane and Mr. Drysdale also came looking for billionaire Howard Hughes in Hooterville. The new urban-dwelling 'Beverly Hillbillies' were not to be separated from their rural homeland. In the reverse rural-urban direction, Oliver Wendell and Lisa Douglas are frequently interacting with the characters of Petticoat Junction.



Figure 4: The season-three cast of Petticoat Junction in 1966: Sitting on table: Higgins the dog, front row (L-R): Lori Saunders (Bobbie Jo), Bea Benaderet (Kate), and Edgar Buchanan (Uncle Joe), back row (L-R): Frank Cady (Sam Drucker), Gunilla Hutton (Billie Jo), Linda Kaye Henning (Betty Jo), Rufe Davis (Floyd Smoot), and Smiley Burnette (Charley Pratt). Promotional photo of the cast of Petticoat Junction (TV series from the United States), season 3 cast in 1966. Source: <http://www.epguides.com/PetticoatJunction/cast.jpg>

The 'Beverly Hillbillies', running longer and with a larger audience, provided the ideal microcosm for the folkish narrative of the rural-urban crossovers. Jed Clampett, an impoverished and widowed mountaineer, relocates to a Beverly Hills mansion and it's "Cement Pond", along with his daughter, Elly May Clampett, and mother-in-law, 'Granny' Daisy May Moses, and Jethro Bodine, the brawny, half-witted son of Jed's cousin Pearl. Jed

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Clampett's good fortune has come by way of the oil-rich swamp on his mountain land, whereby OK Oil Company paid Jed for the right to drill on his land, an income estimated at \$25 million (equivalent to \$211,000,000 in 2019). Added to the railway barons, the oil barons are background to the story of the larger folkish world. The American economic narrative is completed with Milburn Drysdale, Jed's greedy, unscrupulous banker. For Milburn and Margaret Drysdale's misfortune, the Clampett family ends up being neighbours on the Beverly Hill's millionaires' row. The humour for the hillbillies in California – and very different to the humour back-home in Hooterville – is that Los Angeles wants the new-found riches from the hillbillies but are alienated by their folksy wisdom and ways of seeing the world. In many of the storylines there is, in the 1960s, a collision between two worlds; however, seeing the funny-side, has helped to defuse what would otherwise be hostile, and maybe violent. The character of Miss Jane Hathaway, Drysdale's scholarly and 'plain Jane' secretary, is very important in this regard. Jane Hathaway smooths over the tensions and is the resourceful worker who ends up fixing the social problems.



Figure 5: Eddie Albert and Eva Gabor as Oliver and Lisa Douglas from the television program *Green Acres*. 17 September 1965, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eddie_Albert_and_Eva_Gabor_Green_Acres_1965.JPG

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HOLLYWOOD CINEMA 1947-1957

'Ma and Pa Kettle' was better known as characters in ten comedy films, but originally created by Betty MacDonald in her 1945 best-selling novel, *The Egg and I*. The 'Ma and Pa Kettle' characterisation are obviously the basis for the characters we find in Beverly Hills and the Hooterville areas a decade or so later. With only the ten films from 1947 to 1957, the world of the Kettles provide a sharper narrative, linking the ethos of the American folksy 1930s to the far more satirical confrontation of the 1960s. We see in late 1940s and 1950s cinema a dynamic mixture of celebrated nostalgia and progressivist relief from materially-poorer conditions. It was an era greatly troubled by both these ideals and the reality.



Figure 6: The Ma & Pa Kettle Farmhouse. Source: Universal Studios By Source, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=26102908>

In the original *The Egg and I* (1947) we are introduced to Ma and Pa Kettle through the main characters. Betty and Bob MacDonald go to the countryside to follow Bob's dream to be a successful chicken farmer. Ma and Pa background the story as a hillbilly couple with fifteen children. In *Ma and Pa Kettle* (1949), or 'The Further Adventures of Ma and Pa Kettle', the older couple have lived in a broken-down ramshackle farmhouse for twenty-five years in

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rural Cape Flattery, Washington. The Kettles' arch-nemesis, Birdie Hicks, organises a town council meeting to condemn the Kettles' 'garbage dump' farm. In order to receive a new tobacco pouch for entering a contest, Pa Kettle writes a slogan for the King Henry Tobacco Company. Pa Kettle is declared the winner of the contest's grand prize of a new 'house-of-the-future', but, after Pa abandons his new home life, full of puzzling gadgets, and also with accusations over plagiarising the winning slogan, a major slap-stick battle ensues to save the Kettles' new home. The plot hangs on the misunderstanding between folksy wisdom and the Madison Avenue's sell of the modern American home life. It is centrally conveyed through the interaction between Kettles' oldest and college-educated son, Tom, and a 'mod' magazine writer, Kim. Tom is the rural technical innovator with plans to improve a chicken incubator, and he objects to Kim's characterization that the Kettle upbringing had been one of 'abject' poverty. The film challenges the thinking on wealth, between folksy wisdom and American commercialism.

In *Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town* (1950) Pa has won another jingle-writing contest, this one from the Bubble-Ola Company. Ma and Pa are only able to take up the prize of all-expenses paid trip to New York City, when a fleeing bank robber, Shotgun Munger, convinces Pa that he is an eccentric poet, 'Mr. Jones', and he could look after the kids at the farm. The farm gives Munger a hideout from the police and he is also able to convince Pa to deliver a bag (of hidden loot) to his 'brother' Louie in New York. The New York setting becomes the comic routine of the classic 'switching bags' and crossing between the great sites of the metropolis. The newly-wedded Tom and Kim, now living in New York, are on-hand to provide a new world perspective of the early 1950s. As a reward for Tom's and Kim's modern decency, the plot ends with a wealthy investor, caught up in the comic routine, agreeing to finance Tom's chicken incubator. Meanwhile, Munger, so overwhelmed by the 14 wild Kettle children, welcomes arrest by the police in order to be protected from the rural mayhem. The question of what is wealth has continued from the second film but, with a crime plot, there is a question of who deserves wealth. Like most American situation comedy, the messages are somewhat mixed. Crime in urban New York inadvertently led to deserved wealth, and on the flipside, crime out in countryside was punished by the hoodlum actions of rural children.

The clashes of worldviews come thick and fast in *Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm* (1951). Kim is pregnant with the first child in July 1950. Kim's parents, Jonathan and Elizabeth Parker, refined Bostonians, have arrived at the doorstep (still assuming, Cape Flattery, Washington). In order to accommodate the Parkers, the Kettles' provide them with their ultra-modern house (the prize in the earlier story) and returned to their beloved ramshackle farmhouse. Two sub-plots arise. The side-story is about Pa and his Native American friends, Geoduck and the mute Crowbar, searching out the wealth of uranium deposits after a

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radioactive incident when digging a well. It proves to be farce when it is discovered that the only radioactive element on the property is Pa's coveralls, from an unrelated source. The obvious storyline is the feud between the older Parkers and Kettles, creating tension in Tom's and Kim's marriage at the moment of their first born. The story also comes with the classic switching babies' routine. However, each older parent comes to save day for the other family. Mr. Parker, a retired mine owner, saves the farm from being lost to swindlers who are after the phantom uranium deposits. Ma Kettle and Elizabeth Parker make up their differences and are able to work together; the marriage is saved when Kim and Tom assert their independence from the in-laws, and peace and harmony is celebrated for both families together in a grand old farm dinner. The fourth film unpacks the question of wealth in family values. The story of uranium deposits challenges one of the great rural mythologies, that of 'land settlement'. In the end, the value of the land was not its material wealth, but as a place where family peace and harmony could be found. Here there is a tragic irony in the roles of Geoduck and Crowbar.



Figure 7: Original film poster By Universal Pictures (The original uploader was 17Drew at English Wikipedia.) - (Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons by Stef48 using CommonsHelper.), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4724396>

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When we arrive at the fifth film, *Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair* (1952), the series appears to be digging further into American rural history. Poverty is front and centre. Ma and Pa Kettle are trying to raise money to send their daughter Rosie to college, although the couple are now unemployed and in debt. Pa deliberately walks in front of street traffic, hoping to win a monetary injury settlement, but only succeeds in causing a collision. Ma then decides to participate in contests at the county fair, and Pa buys Emma, an old tired horse, on credit for the Harness Race, promising to pay the owner later with Ma's fair prize winnings. The nemesis Birdie Hicks tries her best to win all of the contests, but the Kettles are the ones who get the last laugh. The sixth film, *Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation* (1953), returns to theme of the New York film, but on a grander scale. In May 1953, Ma and Pa Kettle are taken on a trip to Paris, France, by Jonathan and Elizabeth Parker; rural and urban American families are now in full harmony. As with the New York film, there is a crime plot, but with a mysterious envelope rather than a bag of loot. The Kettle children are left in the care of Native American friends. By this stage in the film series, the comedy has settled into shallow farce with little plot development. In *Ma and Pa Kettle at Home* (1954), it is December 1953, and Ma and Pa have returned to the old farm. Another son, Elwin Kettle, has his contest letter, whereby he will find a prized scholarship if two judges of *National Magazine* would evaluate the ramshackle farm as a winner. With *Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki* (1955), it is July 1952, and the Kettles help out Cousin Rodney Kettle in Hawaii with his pineapple business. Ma and Pa get acquainted with blue-blooded Mrs. Andrews who thinks the Kettles are the 'lowliest' people she has met. Farce is now thin prejudice. *The Kettles in the Ozarks* (1956) is another crime plot and touring film. This time, with Pa's absence, Ma and the kids head out to help Pa's brother Sedgewick with his farm in Mournful Hollow, Arkansas. Things get tighter when a couple of bootleggers rent Sedge's barn to manufacture moonshine. With Ma and the kids, the bootleggers get their folksy justice. One can see the creep of the early 1950s Hollywood moralism in this film. The final film, *The Kettles on Old MacDonald's Farm* (1957), hits rock-bottom with thin plot development and antiquated moral attitudes – Ma and Pa help Brad Johnson to turn his girlfriend Sally into a good farm wife. What started as comedy with serious messages of rural-urban valuing becomes a caricature of a caricature. It is the basis for the satirical hillbillies in Beverly Hills.

THE HISTORY OF 'THE GRAPES OF WRATH' 1861-1968

The Grapes of Wrath is an American realist novel written by John Steinbeck and published in 1939. As such, it contrasts much better to the degenerating entertainment seen on television and cinema from the late 1940s. The storyline is framed by one chapter of the Great Depression Years (discussed further on). The 'Dust Bowl' was a period of severe dust

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storms that greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture of the American and Canadian prairies during the 1930s. The ideas of land and farming are part of the story but the novel is really focused on human affairs caught in battles of an emerging political world. In the novel and film version, the social salvation found in the kinder Federal Department of Agriculture's camp for the Californian 'Okies' speaks of that history (discussed further on).² The human affair lies at two levels, that of a family, and that of friendship in a labouring brotherhood. The family is the Joad, who are forced off their farmland in Sallisaw, Oklahoma, from both the impact of the Dust Bowl and the emerging new farming technologies with its rural economics. The environmental story is complex with the exploited and the exploiters coinciding. The older generation, Grandpa and Grandma, died on the migrating journey to California. The old world has perished, and its members do not make it to 'the promised land'. The family is held together, for the whole novel, by Joad family matriarch, Ma. The Route 66 or Will Rogers Highway (opened in 1926), and sometime called the 'Mother Road', is the pathway of the Okies' migration, and, with the arrival of the Steinbeck novel, an American cultural icon was created. The road story is sandwiched by the fraternity between Tom Joad and Jim Casy, first in Oklahoma, and then in California. Casy, an ex-preacher, is an anarchist-kind of Christ figure. The stories of the Okies rural labourers in the fruit-picking land become the first bloodied battle in an American war for economic social justice. It is the West Coast story to the East Coast story of the Bonus Army clash of 1932.



Figure 8: Henry Fonda as Tom Joad. The Grapes of Wrath film still. Original trailer of the film "The Grapes of Wrath" (1940). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Grapes_of_Wrath_\(1940\)_-_Trailer.webm#metadata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Grapes_of_Wrath_(1940)_-_Trailer.webm#metadata)

² The better and kinder camp environment was Weedpatch Camp, one of the clean, utility-supplied camps operated by the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency. It's a symbol of Federal intervention to protect Americans against the discriminatory claims of 'State Rights'. It parallels the same type of federal intervention in the Eisenhower-Kennedy administrations, later, to protect the civil rights movement from the attacks of 'State Rights'.

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The film version of Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel followed very quickly; the screenplay was written by Nunnally Johnson, and directed by John Ford. Although the film changed the plot sequences and drops much of the descriptive imaginary of Steinbeck, it has remained a cinematic classic because it captured Steinbeck's Rural Labourite 'speeches' of the novel. The 'speech' device are segments of dialogue where the writer has a bold message for the audience (discussed further on). The original reference in the title is the Book of Revelation, chapter 14, verse 19: "The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath." The reference also had crept into American nationalist mythology. The 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' (1861) by Julia Ward Howe stated in the first stanza:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:

His truth is marching on.

Mary Harriott Norris, an American writer, had already produced the novel's title in 1901. For all that nationalistic imagery, however, Steinbeck's novel (and the film) is a condemnation of the nation's domestic and terrifying violence. In contrast to most of the historical messaging of the American Civil War; except for Lincoln's 'A House Divided' speech ('I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free', 1858), Steinbeck's imaginary of 'The Grapes of Wrath' is better understood in the political 'war' of the American Great Depression Years. You would have to be cognitively isolated, as a rabid American conspiracy theorist, not to see the mantle of the Republican Abe Lincoln (16th U.S. President, 1861-1865) being passed onto the Democrat Franklin Roosevelt, in the story of pulling the nation together. President Herbert Hoover (31st, 1929-1933) was too caught in the collapsed world of the New York Stock Exchange to understand the new political-economic contract that was required. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (32nd, 1933-1945) presented a 'New Deal', a new social contract. And that was where the battlelines were drawn in the United States. Like the Southern Democrats of the American Civil War, the militant wing of the Republican Party in the 1930s was out of touch with new social, political, and economic realities.

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Fear and alienation in their collapsing world drove many of these Americans to violence against other Americans who were fighting for survival. Roosevelt and his administration were consistently attacked with ridiculously racist conspiracy theories, the very same as those of the National Socialist German Workers' Party in these same years. The same racial theories were considered in the late nineteenth century as the height of social science and sophisticated conversation. That it became politically untenable in the United States was due to the 'New Deal coalition' (1932-1968), a coalition that included the Democratic state party organizations, city machines, labour unions, blue collar workers, 'minorities' (including Jews, Southern and Eastern Europeans, and African-Americans), farmers, white Southerners, people on relief, and intellectuals. Except for the pro-New Deal Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower (34th, 1951-1961) and his moderate Republican supporters, conservative America continued to lose the plot in the 1950s; in what Richard Hofstadter described as *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (1963), and his essays collected in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964). Hofstadter's historiography was known as 'Consensus History', which emphasised the basic unity of American values and the American national character and downplayed conflicts, especially conflicts along class lines. This is where Steinbeck's imaginary of 'The Grapes of Wrath' for the 1930s and 1940s plays an important role in American history more broadly. Steinbeck, unlike Hofstadter, draws out the class lines, but Steinbeck too is creating a consensus view for the American people, based on folksy morality with a concept of decency.



Figure 9: The Grapes of Wrath film still. Original trailer of the film "The Grapes of Wrath" (1940).
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Grapes_of_Wrath_\(1940\)_-_Trailer.webm#metadata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Grapes_of_Wrath_(1940)_-_Trailer.webm#metadata)

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The speeches of the novel and the film are the intellectual documents in this way of thinking. One dialogue is particularly revealing. It comes towards the end of the novel, when Tom has to leave the family to protect them from the lawful consequences of his brutal crime – as revenge for Casy's unlawful killing:

"I thought maybe you could go to a big city. Los Angeles, maybe. They wouldn't never look for you there."

"Hm-m," he said. "Lookie, Ma. I been all day an' all night hidin' alone. Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me. But now I been thinkin' what he said, 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' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn' think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't no good alone."

"He was a good man," Ma said.

Tom went on, "He spouted out some Scripture once, an' it didn' soun' like no hellfire Scripture. He tol' it twicet, an' I remember it. Says it's from the Preacher."

"How's it go, Tom?"

"Goes, 'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lif' up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.' That's part of her."

"Go on," Ma said. "Go on, Tom."

"Jus' a little bit more. 'Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.'"

"An' that's Scripture?"

"Casy said it was. Called it the Preacher."

"Hush—listen."

"On'y the wind, Ma. I know the wind. An' I got to thinkin', Ma—most of the preachin' is about the poor we shall have always with us, an' if you got nothin', why, jus' fol'

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your hands an' to hell with it, you gonna git ice cream on gol' plates when you're dead. An' then this here Preacher says two get a better reward for their work."

"Tom," she said. "What you aimin' to do?"

He was quiet for a long time. "I been thinkin' how it was in that gov'ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an' if they was a fight they fixed it theirselves; an' they wasn't no cops wagglin' their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin' why we can't do that all over. Throw out the cops that ain't our people. All work together for our own thing—all farm our own lan'."

"Tom," Ma repeated, "what you gonna do?"

"What Casy done," he said.

"But they killed him."

"Yeah," said Tom. "He didn' duck quick enough. He wasn' doing nothin' against the law, Ma. I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch—"

Ma said, "Tom, they'll drive you, an' cut you down like they done to young Floyd."

"They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin' all our people."

"You don't aim to kill nobody, Tom?"

"No. I been thinkin', long as I'm a outlaw anyways, maybe I could—Hell, I ain't thought it out clear, Ma. Don' worry me now. Don' worry me."

They sat silent in the coal-black cave of vines. Ma said, "How'm I gonna know 'bout you? They might kill ya an' I wouldn' know. They might hurt ya. How'm I gonna know?"

Tom laughed uneasily, "Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one—an' then—"

"Then what, Tom?"

"Then it don' matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the

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houses they build—why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes."

"I don' un'erstan'," Ma said. "I don' really know."

"Me neither," said Tom. "It's jus' stuff I been thinkin' about. Get thinkin' a lot when you ain't movin' aroun'. You got to get back, Ma."

The reference to Los Angeles is revealing in the thoughts of rural-urban crossovers. The concept of rural spirituality is found in the reference to "his little piece of a great big soul". The concept of union, particularly the labour union, but also family union, is seen in the idea of 'Two are better than one', and 'a three-fold cord'. Perhaps, the reference to 'Wind' is a reminder for the audience to 'Gone with the Wind, the 1939 film and the 1936 Margaret Mitchell novel. The 'wind' inference is narratively different between novels/films, but there is a fearful link to the destruction on farming land and uncivil violence. Significantly, the speech ends with thoughts of law, violence, and justice.

The scene with Tom's farewell speech with Ma is reproduced in the film version, towards the ending, but the final film ending has the ultimate speech from Ma Joad in dialogue with Pa, in the truck heading toward richer pickings:

PA (soberly):

You the one that keeps us goin', Ma.

I ain't no good any more, an' I know

it. Seems like I spen' all my time

these days a-thinkin' how it use'ta

be--thinkin' of home--an' I ain't

never gonna see it no more.

Ma places her hand on one of Pa's and pats it.

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MA:

Woman can change better'n a man. Man
lives in jerks--baby born, or somebody
dies, that's a jerk--gets a farm, or
loses one, an' that's a jerk. With a
woman it's all one flow, like a
stream, little eddies, little
waterfalls, but the river it goes
right on. Woman looks at it like
that.

AL (at the jalopy ahead):

Look at that ol' coffeepot steam!

PA (thinking of what Ma says):

Maybe, but we shore takin' a beatin'.

MA (chuckling):

I know. Maybe that makes us tough.
Rich fellas come up an' they die,
an' their kids ain't no good, an'
they die out. But we keep a-comin'.
We're the people that live. Can't
nobody wipe us out. Can't nobody
lick us. We'll go on forever, Pa.
We're the people.

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(She says this with a simple, unaffected conviction)

The TRUCK, steaming and rattling and churning, passes the Chevrolet and Al leans out of the window and waves a jeering hand at it. As the Joad truck pulls in front, we see Ruthie and Winfield laughing with excitement over the triumph. Even Uncle John shares the general satisfaction. Grinning, he waves. As the truck moves away along the road, all three and beaming and waving. Further along the truck passes a sign on the side of the road. It says NO HELP WANTED.

The role of women is central for both the novel and film. A mother keeps the family together. In contrast is the failure in fatherhood. It is well seen in Connie Rivers who walks out on his pregnant wife, Rose of Sharon. Folksy toughness is being able to survive the turmoils and great sorrow of family life; in both the novel and film, this where the story ends. The exact ending of novel is different to the film, where it is Mother Ma's resourceful planning, which keeps many families alive. On Ma's direction, Rose of Sharon saves a starving stranger (also a father) with her breast milk. The novel's last scene gives greater meaning to the kind and life-saving gesture; one that also has inescapable sexual tone. Rose of Sharon has been brought to a barn in a feverous condition by Ma and Pa. Hours ago, Rose of Sharon has given birth to a still-born baby but is ignorant of the fact from her folksy naivety and Ma's white lying. The novel's last scene all happens in the midst of a flooded camp. The cotton was all picked just in time, but the rains cause mayhem and misery. At the end of the novel, we have the biblical motifs of harvest, floods, the still-born baby, and breast milk. The end of the film is a different kind of narrative. The last written words, 'No Help Wanted' speak to the nation's disunity. The last spoken words of the film are "We're the people".



Figure 10: Buch's home at Slacks Creek (Younger Hans & Henry in photo). Source: Dr Neville Buch's Archives

POPULAR CULTURE AND FAMILY IN QUEENSLAND 1920-1973

But who are 'the people'? We imagine ourselves as being part of 'the people' because of what we have heard in the global liberal democracy story, and for two or three centuries it the global story that has been 'ce-mented' in American cultural motifs. A large theme in this story is 'community and life', and for the last hundred years it has been given a greater folkish interpretation. The folkish outlook is bigger than what is allowed in American cultural motifs; folklore is common to all ethnic cultures. The question has to be asked, is how much of our thinking is shaped in American folk culture by modern mass media, and how much is it what we have inherited by folk traditions closer to home. Here I turn to my own family story. Growing up, my mind was captivated by the stories of rural-themed television, of Hollywood slip-slap country comedy, and of the American history we see in *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was a world very different to my own. My family background is what I would describe as lower middle class (falling back into 'working-class' perspectives and roles). My great-grandfather was a minor, landscape and still-life, oil painter, a Danish migrant with his family in Queensland. In the first few decades of the 20th century, Hans Rasmussen Buch and my grandfather Hans Buch, worked as both small-plot farmers in the Brisbane outer river hills (Brookfield) and as house painters in Brisbane inner suburbs. By the 1920s they

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were residing in a fairly-well-to-do large dwelling at East Brisbane; with décor in European-style paintings and old-fashioned furnishings. They were living in Heidelberg Street. Hans Rasmussen Buch was twice the President of the Danish Association 'Heimdal', in Brisbane, in 1917-1919 and 1920-1921. The Englishness came into our family ethos from younger Hans' wife, my grandmother (and the only grandparent I knew), Daisy Winifred (nee Roberts). The 'Englishness' would later be added upon, with my mother's ancestry from North England (the Reid, O'Brien, and Bruce). On Daisy's family side, there was Uncle Phil who was a curious presence in my own childhood. He was a dirt-poor, small-paddock retired farmer, out on London Road, Gumdale. The placenames gives you the sense of the rural-urban crossovers.

When the Depression Years hit Australia the Buch family had abandoned their comfortable lower middle class life for a sustenance small-plot farm in the scrubby land of Slacks Creek, half-a-day's trip into the bush, south of Brisbane township (which technically was a small city but underdeveloped due to the parochial politics of Queensland). Apart from the land, the only asset the family had was a horse and cart, and horse had to be shot when it got stuck in Slacks Creek. By 1932, the family recovered sufficiently, with the younger Hans regaining his employment as a house painter and purchasing land for the 'hobby farm' in Coopers Plains. The transference from Slacks Creek to Coopers Plains is revealing. The property at Slacks Creek was 10 acres, and only four acres was provided at Coopers Plains, but the latter was considered better land to be had. You can see the theme of crossing rural working class and urban middle class boundaries, playing out in my great grandfather's and great-grandmother's (Augusta Louise Andersen) European artistic tastes, the combining of careers in small-plot farming and house painting, and living across Brisbane Southside between the bush-rural farm, the semi-rural estate, and the well-to-do inner suburb. The transvaluing of the class 'border crossings' occurred on all sides of the family. My mother's father, William Reid from Yorkshire, had a career semblance as a carter, a contract carpenter, and (I think) an office railway worker (the family stories are too *ad hoc* for my liking). One of the insights I have gained from my social history is how working-class and middle-class valuing mixed in the same person. William Reid was also a 'lodge man', as were many of the local historical figures I am now researching in my work. The men's secret societies were vehicles of 'middle-class lift'.

I was born in 1961, after my parents had crossed over that invisible sociological divide between the working class and the middle class. Growing up in the 1960s, there were landscapes and commodities that expressed the rising into the lower end of the middle economic band. My father was into the British automobile fame, the Austin. We lived close to the Green Belt. It was semi-rural land that my grandfather bought in the 1930s, in Coopers Plains, which had become the new estates in the late 1960s, just on the outer-side

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of the Southside Green Belt of Brisbane. My father skipped over the sociological boundary before I had come along in 1961. Douglas Buch trained and worked as an electrician but re-educated at college and had a long career as primary state school teacher, mostly as the music teacher. My mother, Dorothy (nee Reid), was mostly the full-time mother, but she did work as a book-keeper, before and after the young family period of her life.



Figure 11: The new Buch home on 67 Orange Grove Road, at the Coopers Plains hobby farm. Source: Dr Neville Buch's Archives

FAMILY AND POPULAR CULTURE

American television, cinema, and novels have shaped our worldviews, not just in Queensland-Australia, but in most places in the world. The story of 'The Grapes of Wrath' in its different formats arose out of the factors of American history, but the story is recognisable in other versions of folklore. The folklore distorts the understanding of history, as does the global entertainment franchise. However, the folklore has its own role in the social histories, but only if we read the farce and the speeches deeper than the folklore narratives. History is about both conflict and consensus. We live in one world, even with the disunity of politics. In some way we are all connected in the rural-urban crossovers, making wine from grapes violently crushed. Something always dies and lives in us when we see the past connections.

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In my own family story there have been the same connections of rural poverty and dreams of urban wealth. The narratives are different; most families have never known the starvation, violence, and sense of loss inflicted on the Joad family. Folksy characters are a fictional family, but real human beings in relationships have experienced this tale of woe and hope. It inspires those of us who been more fortunate but is no less in life's struggles of poverty and loss. The lesson, I hope that I have shown in this tale, is that we should not be beguiled by entertainment's characterisation, which is always caricature of some kind. History has better characters.



Figure 12: The Buch Family, Hans, Douglas, Daisy & Henry. Source: Dr Neville Buch's Archives

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Television

[*The Beverly Hillbillies*](#) at the [Museum of Broadcast Communications](#)

[*Petticoat Junction*](#) at [The Interviews: An Oral History of Television](#)

[*Green Acres*](#) on [ION Television](#)

Cinema

[*Ma and Pa Kettle*](#) at the [TCM Movie Database](#)

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