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Motherhood and Socialism in
John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of
Wrath*: a Contrastive Analysis of
the Italian Translations

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a critical reading of John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* centered on the main female characters of the novel, Ma Joad and her daughter Rose of Sharon, as bulwarks of the political socialist ideology, which is constantly present throughout the novel. By subverting the typical role of the American woman of that period as an entity indivisible from the care of the house and of the family members, the two figures, first Ma Joad and her daughter subsequently, emerge in their own right as the embodiment of the feminine and maternal element and become leading and exemplary voices of a type of socialism that has actually very little to do with political engagement. In the context of the novel they represent a 'socialism of the feelings' that has to be intended much more as social mission than as a fight against the power of the banks and the dispossession of the properties. These two female voices resonate in the America of the 1930s: a nation that in those years, timorous and perplexed, has to cope with the diffusion of the term 'socialism', an unknown word just few years earlier. With their gestures, acts and words these two female characters firmly reject the individualism that was so deeply rooted in the American identity and try to open the close cell of the family to fellow people, to the weakest and to all those human beings who similarly have had to accept the compromise of erasing their own past and to transit with huge suffering and endurance through the present in order to eventually reach an extremely uncertain future.

The text is a classic of the American literature, possibly Steinbeck's most powerful and debated novel whose complexity is mostly due to a constant use of slang and broken expressions, typical of spoken language but also to the variety of themes. These themes have been presented not only through the author's direct intervention by mean of 'interchapters'

but also through the variety of characters, who stand out as emblems of a cross-section of mankind.

It is noteworthy that the novel was first published in Italy in 1940, while Fascism was raging in Europe: it resulted in a translation extremely influenced by the dogmas of the regime, which could not welcome a kind of literature clearly dealing with the idea of mass democracy and the celebration of the 'we' over the 'I', that is of the 'Manself' (ch. 14), although none in Steinbeck's novel was intended with political purposes.

My reading of the novel will revolve around the comparison of three different realizations of the text. The original version will be confronted with the two existing Italian translations, the first one by Carlo Coardi (1940) and the latest by Sergio Claudio Perroni (2013), and to its cinematic version, directed by John Ford (1940). Some selected scenes have been chosen for their relevance to the theme of this dissertation: their contrastive analysis will show how the historical period conditioned the earlier Italian translation, how the characters of Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon have emerged differently in the three versions and consequently how specific semantic choices can play a crucial role in the way in which the character is perceived by the reader or viewer. The two women have been considered pivotal, both narratologically and thematically, and through their characterization it has been possible to analyze some of the themes essential to the novel.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION: *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* AND THE ITALIAN FASCIST CENSORSHIP

An historical introduction to the translated work by Coardi is necessary for a full understanding of the stakes at play in translating Steinbeck's work in Italy in the forties. As it has often been the case, dictatorships and military regimes always had a great influence over the publications of books and more generally over all forms of art, from literature to radio programs. As far as literature is concerned, this of course affected not only the distribution of original texts but also their translations, which went under a process of cuts and revisions that frequently changed the contents dramatically; this implied the fact that people were reading novels that did not correspond to the original. Luckily some of them have been retranslated in recent times, or in times of press freedom at least, while for many others justice has not been done yet. This is exactly what happened with Steinbeck's novel: published in the US by Viking Press in 1939, the novel was immediately translated by Carlo Coardi and published by the Italian editing press Bompiani the following year. *Furore*¹ went to press while the Fascist regime led by Mussolini was raging in Italy and just by rapidly confronting the original version with its Italian translation it is easy to perceive a textual intervention aimed at concealing or even erasing what was not in accordance with the regime's diktats. No doubt that this also contributed to the immediate success of the novel - 40.000 copies sold in the first few months and six reprintings by the end of 1941 - and to the great expectations over Perroni's recent revised and corrected translation in 2013.

Such text could not pass unnoticed in a country such as Italy: although it cannot be said to be a political pamphlet, it undeniably is a 'socialist' novel, the essence of which is based on the ideas of collectivism, of necessary transformation of society, of fight against social injustices: goals that the characters are ready to jeopardize their life for. Besides the political element, a

¹ Italian title for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

gender-related social issue was also disturbing, as the kind of women Steinbeck narrated embodied the opposite of the typical exemplary women in Fascist era.

It is important to stress that we should not think that whatever in the novel does not literally correspond to the original version is the result of a ferocious censorship. As I have previously noted, many stylistic choices are in fact related to specific trends of that time in the translations' field, for instance the (overabundant) use of periphrasis in which words frequently happen to get lost. Having said that, if, on the one hand, the reader will stumble across omissions that are anything but literary choices, on the other one, the complex historical period did exert a remarkable influence on the contents of the translated version.

It is necessary to specify that at that time the Ministry of Popular Culture, which operated between 1937 to 1944, was instructed to control culture in all its forms and to organize Fascist propaganda. Many translated pieces of foreign literature needed an examination before their publication: sometimes they contained materials and themes clearly unsuitable for the Italian public, sometimes this edge was less manifest, sometimes the fame of the author did not allow drastic infringements. For all these reasons the publishing houses used to ask the Ministry for a preventive control over drafts, even though it was a common usage for many translators themselves to self-censure their own work; after these procedures the translated text was ready to enter the Italian literary market. In the light of these facts, it is curious that the Ministry gave its consent to the publication of such a novel, so little veiled in its anti-fascist contents. The historian John Diggins gives us the answer by underlining that the regime was willing to eradicate from Italian social consciousness the widespread feeling of admiration toward foreign countries, toward their wealth, organization or intellectual refinement; therefore "fascist authorities deliberately published John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, assuming its depressing agrarian scenes would demonstrate the virtues of the Corporate State to Italian intellectuals" (Dunnett 113). This actually led to an opposite reaction because

people came to be interested and to value a country that did not gag writers like Steinbeck and his strong social accusations. Yet when the United States joined the second world conflict against the Axis Powers, the Ministry changed its open position toward the book so much so that when the second permission of its second reprint was asked in 1942, the Ministry replied that: “the Ministry does not consider it opportune, at least for the time being, for the volume in question to be reprinted, since the content of the novel is incompatible with our ideas and our customs” (Dunnett 37).²

Yet it is also worthwhile to point out that Italy was not immune to the ‘American fascination’: before Italy and USA became war enemies, American culture, be it literature or cinematography, had always been praised in Italy, even during the Fascist period. More precisely the Italian attitude toward it was a mixture of appeal and condemnation so much so that “Mussolini himself frequently displayed open admiration for the achievements of American society” (Dunnett 115). In a way, there was a sort of (possibly unwitting) pro-American attitude within an anti-American regime, which in those pre-war years did not apply a too rigid veto on the circulation of American texts. From the very end of 1941 on, many things changed and, as it was easily foreseeable, the deputy Ministry declined the reprint of the translation of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Moreover, already during 1941, the Ministry turned down many other American texts that Bompiani was willing to publish, claiming that: “The US are potential enemies: their president acted against Italian people improperly. This is not the right moment to treat them with kindness, not even in the literary field. Moreover I am not willing to fuel the excessive enthusiasm toward the latest American literature: a trend I will not support...” (Cesari 90).

It is interesting now to observe in detail which elements and images of Steinbeck’s novel collided with Fascist ideals. The political element is definitely the most evident one:

² This is the translated content of the letter that the Ministry of Popular Culture addressed to the Prefecture of Milan and to Bompiani, on July 15th, 1942.

Steinbeck was perceived as a 'Bolshevik' writer; he was one of the strongest intellectual voices who, with his works, was struggling to spread in America a new social conscience, aimed at giving voice to those Americans who were striving against the monopoly of the machine and the supremacy of money. He allowed the reader to discover the dark sides of the American dream, with his characters facing terrible predicaments just to get food and shelter. But if at an early stage the novel was supposed even to benefit propaganda, as it showed the readers the dramatic effects of the American system, it then started to represent a menacing vehicle of deviant ideals. The other disturbing element of the novel was the way in which the women of the story were described; we have already stated that Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon were anything but the ideal fascist women and there are many elements that prove that. First of all fascist women had to be healthy and fit in order to become mothers of a healthy progeny, according to the 'life rules' established by the Dux (Cesari 47); therefore press and literature had to avoid descriptions of very thin women, as the ideal standard was a voluptuous woman, sufficiently strong to give birth, take care of and feed the family. As a matter of fact, fascist women were not allowed to be emancipated, neither in society in general nor in the working field; their socially accepted role was to be mothers and devoted, namely subservient, wives. This is because, to the Fascist regime, the consolidation of the traditional family was of crucial importance since a stable family was essential for the establishment of a stable society. In this perspective it is easy to understand that the women's identity was merely associated to her reproductive system and to her housework skills. Both Ma Joad and her daughter Rose were definitely not role models. Although she is a mother of five and often described while doing household chores, Ma Joad is not afraid of speaking up and of taking the lead of the family without hesitation when men prove to be unable to do that. Rose instead was even less admirable, almost a damned soul: first she is abandoned by her husband with whom she is expecting her first child, in the meanwhile she does not have a stable house and she is possibly suffering from malnutrition and eventually she will deliver a

stillborn baby and, most scandalous image of all, breastfeeds an old dying man. Motherhood was in fact something to be celebrated and mothers should not be scared by illnesses, destitution, miscarriages or failed pregnancies. The fact that the life condition of these two women is such a constant element within the narration saved Coardi from an excessive censorship. Even the famous ending scene has not been omitted, although it possibly is the most disturbing one; so, on the one hand, the changing and omission of many scenes would affect the narration and thus, jeopardize the understanding of the text; on the other hand, Rose's gesture, as a consequence of hunger and destitution, should scare women and make them feel blessed not to live in the era of American Great Depression, of not being considered "scum" (241) and be proud instead to live in Italy under the protective wing of Fascist regime.

I.

Characters' Introduction Through Translation

1.1 - MA JOAD

Ma Joad is the first feminine character of the Joad family to be presented and the description that Steinbeck realizes of her is extremely precise and focuses on her appearance and physical features with an abundance of details. Ma is first caught in her habitual act of cooking the meal for the family while still in their Oklahoma house, just before their departure toward California; Steinbeck does not describe her in general terms but rather dwells on each of her most revealing traits, enriching her description with precise details which remain in the reader's mind. This implies the fact that what we are talking about are not simply adjectives functional to her first appearance onto the scene, but they are actually hints to understand her character and her attitude toward life and mankind, both family members and people she has come across.

This premise becomes necessary when we confront Steinbeck's original version with Coardi's Italian translation. One of its most striking aspects is how the use and the choice of such important elements such as the adjectives take a direction which dramatically reverses Steinbeck's intentions, particularly the image of Ma Joad's motherhood. In terms of translation, all this appears even more fascinating if we consider the fact that Coardi's 'alterations' are not inopportune or totally wrong but rather misleading and ambiguous because the work of semantic finesse and precision the author did vanishes. The result, thus, is that the Italian reader of 1940 makes the acquaintance of an ordinary Oklahoma's mother but not with John Steinbeck's Ma Joad. On the one hand, we have always to keep in mind that the abundance of periphrasis and the various stylistic choices made by Coardi reflect the translating style of his epoch, more redundant and stilted than the essential and literal one of these days and he therefore cannot be stigmatized for that; on the other hand, it is undeniable that Fascist censorship and its ideals took their toll on many scenes of the novel and

characters, and in many respects: Ma Joad was definitely not the kind of woman one should imitate.

The woman is described through Tom's eyes, just been paroled and back home for good.

Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child-bearing and work. [...] her strong, broad, bare feet moved quickly and deftly over the floor. Her thin, steel-gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head. Strong, freckled arms were bare to the elbow, and her hands were chubby and delicate, like those of a plump little girl (85).³

Coardi translates as follow:

La mamma s'era fatta, non grassa, ma pesante, materiale. [...] I piedi, larghi e nudi, si muovevano tuttavia con agilità, e senza rumore. I capelli grigi erano raccolti in un misero nodo sulla nuca. Mostrava nude fino al gomito, le forti braccia lentiginose, ma le mani apparivano bianche, tonde, delicate, come d'una bimba grassoccia (83).⁴

Perroni's version is instead closer to the original, not only in terms of lexical choices but especially for her ability to give the reader the same image of Ma Joad that Steinbeck had in mind:

Ma' era robusta, ma non grassa: appesantita dalle gravidanze e dal lavoro. [...] e i suoi piedi larghi e forti, scalzi, si muovevano lesti e agili sull'assito. I capelli fini e grigi erano raccolti in una piccola crocchia sulla nuca. Le maniche della veste coprivano fino al gomito le braccia forti e lentiginose, e le mani erano piene e delicate come quelle di una bambina paffuta (104).⁵

There is a definite difference between the original and Coardi's translation and this is not simply about shades of meaning which get lost in almost every translation. In this case it is all a matter of adjectives. If in the original version Ma Joad corresponds to the 'ideal' mother, very typical in her appearance, a middle-aged woman whose tenderness and faded youth have remained in some of her traits, in Coardi's version there is no trace of gracefulness; indeed Ma Joad appears clumsy and dowdy. Describing a woman as "pesante, materiale" amounts to a demeaning of her femininity even more if we consider the omission of the sentence that follows - "thick with child bearing and work" - which explains the reasons of her shape: hard

³ From then on, all subsequent excerpts and quotes from the original text refers to: Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. London: Penguin books, 1939. Print.

⁴ From then on, all subsequent excerpts and quotes from the first Italian translated version by Carlo Coardi refers to: Steinbeck, John. *Furore*. Trans. Carlo Coardi. Milano: Bompiani, 1940. Print.

⁵ From then on, all subsequent excerpts and quotes from the latest Italian translated version by Sergio Claudio Perroni refers to: Steinbeck, John. *Furore*. Trans. Sergio Claudio Perroni. Milano: Bompiani, 2013. Print.

work and five pregnancies. The decision of omitting this part, which may baffle the reader, becomes clear if we think about the role of women during Italian Fascism. In a period in which the numerous pregnancies were celebrated and the woman was supposed to be a devoted (house)wife and a proud mother of a numerous brood, focusing on the unattractive physical effects of such activities would be counter-productive.

Further on, in describing her feet, Coardi skips the adjective “strong”, which is definitely not a good choice because, metaphorically speaking, Ma’s feet are simply the strongest of the family: they are the base of such strong woman and have taken her so far away. However if the free translation of “quickly and deftly” with “con agilità e senza rumore” can be acceptable, the addition of the adjective “misero” to describe the knot on her head is frankly excessive. The Italian reader immediately associates it with an image of destitution and shabbiness while actually Steinbeck always associated her with dignity and tidiness. Coardi then fails in correctly rendering the description of Ma Joad’s hands which are “like those of a plump girl” (85) and translates this metaphor with “come d’una bimba grassoccia” (83). Perroni, who rendered it with “come quelle di una bimba paffuta” (104), managed instead to express the tenderness and delicacy of Steinbeck’s comparison while Coardi, by using the derogatory “grassoccia”, erases all the implicit positivity and poetry. Then the description continues:

Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and sufferings like steps into a high calm and superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken (85).⁶

⁶ “Gli occhi marroni sembravano aver sperimentato tutte le tragedie, scalando a grado a grado il dolore fino alla vetta, per spaziare nelle supreme sfere d’una comprensione e d’una tranquillità sovraumane. Sembrava conoscere, accettare, gradire la sua posizione: era la cittadella della famiglia, la roccaforte inespugnabile” (Coardi 83).

I suoi occhi nocciola sembravano aver vissuto ogni tragedia possibile, salendo come gradini il dolore e la sofferenza fino a raggiungere una comprensione sovraumana e un sommo equilibrio. Sembrava conoscere, accettare, gradire il suo ruolo di cittadella della famiglia, di roccaforte inespugnabile” (Perroni 104).

These few lines are extremely important because they give a perfect portrayal of Ma Joad's character, beside her appearance. In a certain way her eyes seem to have already experienced what will happen in the next chapters, but always maintaining firmness and self-control. Steinbeck describes her as 'the citadel of the family' and no other definition could fit her best. Her presence is comforting, she takes care of every member of the Joad family and everyone can rely on her but first and foremost she struggles for the family unity as she realizes that the more the journey goes on the more the family loses its members. Differently from the other characters she seems to dwell on a higher position, from which she can control without oppressing her family members. It is curious that such a role has been given to a woman and not to a man, which is not what one could expect: indeed her husband does not seem to share her physical and psychological indestructibility. In the end, a last excerpt with Ma standing overwhelmed in front of her paroled son Tom:

She breathed heavily through her open mouth [...] She moved toward him lithely, soundless in her bare feet, and her face was full of wonder (86).

Once again Coardi presents a translation which detaches itself from the original as far as the use of adjectives is concerned.

... respirò rumorosa tra le labbra socchiuse, [...] Ella avanzò verso di lui, e il suo volto era pieno di meraviglia (84).

The use of "rumorosa" to render 'heavy' is not only inappropriate but it makes her sounding very masculine, if not beastly-like. Moreover "lithely" as well as "soundlessly in her bare feet" have disappeared and only a surprised face has been left. Perroni does instead translate as follows:

Respirava affannosamente, con la bocca aperta. [...] lei gli si avvicinò con delicatezza, silenziosa con i suoi piedi scalzi, e aveva il viso pieno di meraviglia (105).

By comparing these brief excerpts regarding Ma Joad we may conclude that the way Coardi approached the translation is sometimes excessively disjointed from the original text. What I would like to remark is the fact that with this character Coardi has deliberately used terms that

have nothing to do with their original meaning, and refused the use of Italian adjectives and expressions that would have suited better. His 'free' translation resulted in the delineation of a character whose features were more likely to produce in the reader a sense of pity rather than tenderness and sympathy.

In delineating Ma Joad's character it is also necessary to analyze her cinematic version in John Ford movie. Ma's role was interpreted by American actress Jane Darwell and much of the spirit of Steinbeck's character has been maintained. Yet the actress' look may be misleading if we confront it with the novel's character; first of all Darwell was already in her sixties when casted for the role and this definitely affected the way in which her character was perceived by the viewer: Darwell looks slightly too old for the part and this makes her appear more like a grandma or aunt so much so that Steinbeck as well agreed with that and feared that Darwell's look could give an image of a more sentimental and softer Ma Joad. As for her outer look, Ford's Ma is a plump busty woman, her face is weary but chubby and, differently from the novel, she always wears a curious hat, very girly and almost funny. Yet it is also important to note that Ford's aim was not that of giving a perfect representation of Steinbeck's novel: as a matter of fact the director followed the book closely but there are also many differences between the two, many scenes have been reduced or skimmed but this does not influence negatively the final result. We do not have to forget that a movie is not always the novel's literal projection on the screen and thus, the line followed by the director is not necessarily the same of the writer. Yet critics agree in deeming Darwell's performance as masterful because of her ability in rendering Ma Joad's firmness and sensibility. Not ascribable to the actress is instead a lesser interest on the family's self-sacrifice and on the fact that the Joads are representative of all the migrant families heading to California. This means that in the movie the camera mainly focuses on the Joads' group, on their mishaps and on all the events strictly related to them, presenting a different concept of human family.

Politics, history, land and oppression are all elements that disappear in the movie, as the attention is focused on the long journey of the Joads and on the happenings within the family. So much so that some of the scenes that have a symbolical 'humanitarian' meaning, especially those involving Rose, have been omitted in the movie; what characterizes the movie is thus a general individuality which contrasts with the core message of the novel, where instead the 'others' and the collectivity are essential in the narration; as a matter of fact "Steinbeck has structured the book in such a way that the reader cannot forget that the family is only one of many families, that is part of a larger organism composed not only of families but also of land and plants and animal and weather" (Sobchack 115). Therefore if in Steinbeck the Joads are part of a greater family, where the historical-social context has to be intended as a main character, in Ford's movie they appear to be an isolated entity, that goes beyond space and time; in this sense "their family unit is not metaphorical in function; it is, instead, illustrative" (Sobchack 115). This has not to be intended as a praise of the novel over the movie, or vice versa, but what we are dealing with is rather a different way of portraying the same character, that is the Joad family. Yet considered the complexity and variety of themes dealt in the novel we cannot but recognize Ford's problematic role in condensing all these elements in nearly 130 minutes; whereas the novel allows in fact the author to freely deal with many different issues, the movie is instead confined to the rhythm and screen times, to images: it would have been very difficult to translate Steinbeck's 'interchapters' for example into the play without recurring to an external narrator. Ford has therefore opted for the easier and more immediate way of portraying a family and paying less attention to its metaphorical and emblematic role.

1.2 - ROSE OF SHARON

With Rose of Sharon, Ma Joad's late-teen pregnant daughter, the reader can recognize in Coardi's translation similar aspects that have already been observed as far as the description of her mother is concerned. Similarly, the Rose of Sharon the Italian translator introduces us to is a sort of non correspondent version of the original one with additions and omissions that are in both cases macroscopic. Here is the moment Rose of Sharon enters the scene:

Beside them, clinging lightly to the bars, stood Rose of Sharon, and she balanced, swaying on the balls of her feet, and took up the road shock in her knees and hams. For Rose of Sharon was pregnant and careful. Her hair, braided and wrapped around her head, made an ash-blond crown. Her round soft face, which had been voluptuous and inviting a few months ago, had already put on the barrier of pregnancy, the self-sufficient smile, the knowing perfection-look; [...] Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. [...] And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms of reproduction and of motherhood. Connie, her nineteen-year-old husband, who had married a plump, passionate hoyden, was still frightened and bewildered at the change in her; for there were no more cat fights in bed, biting and scratching with muffled giggles and final tears. There was a balanced, careful, wise creature who smiled shyly but very firmly at him. Connie was proud and fearful of Rose of Sharon (110-111).

Accanto a loro stava Rosa Tea, reggendosi con una mano ad un montante del tetto, intenta ad equilibrare sui piedi il peso del corpo ed a neutralizzare mediante l'elasticità delle ginocchia e delle anche le scosse causate dalle disuguaglianze del fondo stradale. Perché Rosa Tea era gravida, e cautelosa. I capelli avvolti a treccia le incorniciavano il capo con una corona d'oro pallido. La sua dolce faccia tondetta, ancor pochi mesi prima così sbarazzina e allettante, aveva già messo su la barriera della maternità, cioè il sorriso della donna che si sa importante, l'aspetto da saputella; [...]. In lei atti e pensieri miravano unicamente al frutto che le maturava nel grembo [...] Per lei, il mondo intero era gravido: pensava solo in termini di riproduzione e di maternità. Connie, il suo sposo diciannovenne, che aveva impalmato una libidinosa puledra brada, era ancora sconcertato dal cambiamento avvenuto in lei; perché in letto non si azzuffavano più come gattini, non si mordevano più, non si graffiavano più tra risa soffocate e lagrime conclusive. Vedeva al proprio fianco una savia prudente equilibrata creatura che gli sorrideva remissiva ma con inquietante fermezza. Connie era fiero e insieme pavido di Rosa Tea (106).

More similar to the original is instead Perroni's version:

Accanto a loro, tenendosi con delicatezza alle stanghe, c'era Rose of Sharon, che badava a tenersi in equilibrio dondolandosi sui talloni, e ad assorbire con le ginocchia e le anche gli scossoni della strada. Perché Rose of Sharon era incinta e cauta. I suoi capelli intrecciati e arrotolati al capo le facevano una corona biondo-cenere. Il suo morbido viso ovale, che qualche mese prima era ancora voluttuoso e invitante, aveva ormai alzato la barriera della gravidanza, il sorriso appagato, lo sguardo di oculata perfezione; [...] L'insieme dei suoi pensieri e dei suoi atti era rivolto all'interno, verso il piccolo. [...] E per lei era l'intera terra ad essere incinta: pensava solo in termini di riproduzione e di maternità. Connie, il marito diciannovenne, che aveva sposato una monella procace e sfrontata, era ancora spaventato e

sbalordito da quel cambiamento; perché non c'erano più le schermaglie nel letto, i morsi e i graffi tra le risate soffocate che sfociavano in lacrime. C'era una creatura e equilibrata, prudente e saggia, che lo teneva a bada con un sorriso dolce ma risoluto. Connie era fiero e timoroso di Rose of Sharon (135).

First of all what immediately draws our attention is the curious translation of 'Rose of Sharon' in 'Rosa Tea': Coardi cannot be blamed for it, since the translation of foreign names into their most similar Italian equivalent was a past common praxis, although it inevitably deprived the character of its name's individuality and unicity. All the more so if we consider the Biblical origin of the woman's name: the first appearance of the name Rose of Sharon has to be traced to King James version of the Song of Solomon 2, which opens with the line "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." By translating her name this religious reference gets lost yet it is also important to note that, although her name fits itself in the series of Biblical references of the novel, there is no specific intention to parallel Rose with the Biblical character; the two women have in fact no similar existences and we may possibly assume that the choice is simply due to the name's sonority and allure. Focusing on her description once again Coardi shows a preference for paraphrases when describing, in this case a certain physical position, a tendency that we have already seen in Ma Joad's description, too. More precisely, the deliberate addition of specific terms such as "neutralizzare", "elasticità" or "disuguaglianze del manto stradale" not only does not correspond to the original text but are also strongly inappropriate. The next lines provide us with some hints to finally get an idea of this girl's personality. We can understand Coardi's 'self-censorship' in rendering this girl less sensual and provocative by translating the word 'voluptuous' with "sbarazzina", what is instead arguable is the rendering of "self-sufficient smile" with "sorriso della donna che si sa importante" and "the knowing perfection-look" with "l'aspetto da saputella." I personally think that Coardi should have paid more attention to her attitude and her smile by proceeding with a less imprudent translation. Hers is the first

smile to be described in the novel and hers is the one that closes it. In both cases the smiles are quite similar and its being 'self-sufficient' ironically seems to forebode her destiny of abandoned wife, as her immature dreamer husband Connie will desert her as soon as they get to California. Yet Rosasharn does not act haughtily nor is she the typical know-all girl. From "plump, passionate hoyden" she has suddenly turned into a mysterious woman, which has actually caught her husband off-balance and it is right with her pregnancy that she starts her own personal journey that progresses along Route 66. Before achieving wisdom and maturity she often leaves the reader perplexed with her childish and dreamy behavior; she is, however, the one who seems to treasure a romantic faith in the future which by the way is actually given very little space within the harsh realism of the novel. She looks at the events with the same amazement and fear of a little girl, while actually she is expected to act and think like a grown-up woman, and this leads her to naively consider whatever mishap or tragic event as dangerous for her baby, be it the death of the family dog or the ill-considered words of some disturbed people. However, despite her naivety and waspishness she possibly is the only evolving character along a trajectory that goes from an immature pregnant girl to a wise woman at the end of the novel. Another interesting element is the fascinating way in which her condition of pregnant woman is described. Historically, pregnant women have always enjoyed a particular regard and respect and have been treated with particular attention; Rose as well is not treated differently and although her living conditions do not permit great comfort everybody avoids to overburden her with excessive work or worries. Not only does people's attitude change toward her but her attitude as well visibly transforms. When the narrator says that Rose "had already put on the barrier of pregnancy" it is a way of saying that she can no longer be seen with sexual interest, nor even by her husband; the narrator uses an animal metaphor to describe the girl's spirit before pregnancy – "hoyden" – and even their fights in bed are dubbed "cat fights"; while now Al has instead to getting used to "a balanced, careful, wise creature who smiled shyly but very firmly at him." What she has erected is a

boundary that separates her from the others and elevates her to a further state of pureness in which she is like a goddess. Matter of fact what strikes us about her the most is her “self-sufficient smile, the knowing perfection-look”: it is as if she needed nothing, her look exudes confidence and quietness and Rose is aware of her mystic almost divine aura. As we have said this makes her appear less ‘human’ and more ‘royal’, so much so that her hair makes on her head an “an ash-blond crown”, just like a queen. Coardi emphasizes this feature by rending it with “corona d’oro pallido” instead of the more literal “corona biondo-cenere”, adding therefore the golden element, even though Steinbeck did not mention it. The use of the term “d’oro” may sound a little excessive but it offers us many hints to reflect about Rose’s special condition that has changed her attitude as woman and wife: “Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. [...] And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms of reproduction and of motherhood” (109). We do not have to think that she acts with indifference or that she is distant from her family’s problems, indeed she fears that anything could cause harm to her baby. Yet at the same time we can see how she always seems to be on a different level, compared to other characters; not for haughtiness but because she is in her own dimension, full of secrets and mystery. This is particularly evident to her husband Connie, who has understood that something has changed in Rose’s attitude and by the way he adores being part of her fascinating world:

She looked at him and smiled secretly. She was all secrets now she was pregnant, secrets and little silences that seemed to have meanings. [...] Connie was pleased with her too, and filled with wonder that she was pregnant. [...] The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making a small orbit about her (150).⁷

⁷ “Ella sorrise e gli scoccò un’occhiata piena di sottintesi. Nella sua gravidanza era tutta segreti e sorrisi e silenzi carichi di reconditi significati. [...] Orgoglioso anche lui dello stato di sua moglie [...]. Il mondo si era ristretto attorno a loro due, ed essi ne erano il centro; o piuttosto Rosa Tea ne era il centro, con Connie che da buon satellite disegnava la sua orbita attorno a lei” (Coardi 144).

“Lei lo guardò e gli fece un sorriso pieno di segretezza. Da quando era incinta era tutta segreti: segreti e piccoli silenzi che sembravano densi di significato. [...] Anche Connie era contento di lei, ed era incantato dal suo essere incinta. [...] Il mondo si era stretto intorno a loro, e loro ne erano il centro, o meglio era Rose of Sharon ad esserne il centro, mentre Connie descriveva una piccola orbita intorno a lei” (Perroni 181).

It is Rose to be the center and Connie proudly observes her in her new condition of mother-to-be, in her new attitude and countenance; what he is discovering is a new woman, less carefree and extroverted and more introspective and modest. Furthermore throughout the reading, attention is often drawn to Rose's smile: as a matter of fact, her feelings are often conveyed by means of her smile and yet this does not always allow us to penetrate her mind. In this sense she possibly is the most elusive character and it is often difficult to partake her fears and anguishes thoroughly because of this imaginary barrier through which she separates herself from the outer world. We may also assume that this barrier is her only mean to detach herself from her troubled life; as we will come to know later on, Rose has specific plans for her future and hopes to change her life completely but nothing will turn the way she expected. Maternity becomes thus her shield, in which she silently develops her character an inner strength to eventually emerge stronger than anybody else.

As Susan Shillinglaw has noted Rosasharn "is a seed, 'the "anlage" of the moving, questing people" (67) and as anlage is a synonym for germ, essence "each seed is a tiny sphere of potential displacement and change" (Shillinglaw 148). As a matter of fact while Tom is an adult and Al is already a grown-up man now, she is the only one to whom Ma Joad still has to teach how to face life, especially how not to get blinded by the fears, maintain control over the emotions and not being overwhelmed by sadness: "Ma nurtures her daughter to dignify maturity, a simple decency that endures" (Shillinglaw 67). In other words, Ma Joad is basically raising a future Ma Joad. Moreover Rose has often been described as a whiner, a spoiled girl who seems to be unable to get used to living in such conditions, her father himself complains about that claiming "That Rosasharn is gettin' awful scary an' nimsy-mimsy" (225). On the one hand, Pa Joad is not completely wrong but on the other hand it is inevitable to feel at the same time a sense of compassion and sympathy toward her; before judging her we should put ourselves in the situation of a young girl, next to childbirth, abandoned by her

man, hungry, with no fix abode and with an uncertain future. Moreover, similarly to her younger brother Al, she dreamed of abandoning the agrarian kind of life and start a life anew elsewhere, as she confessed to her mother along the journey:

“Ma,” she said. Ma's eyes lighted up and she drew her attention toward Rose of Sharon. Her eyes went over the tight, tired, plump face, and she smiled. “Ma,” the girl said, “when we get there, all you gonna pick fruit an' kinda live in the country, ain't you?”

Ma smiled a little satirically. “We ain't there yet,” she said. “We don't know what it's like. We got to see.”

“Me an' Connie don't want to live in the country no more,” the girl said. “We got it all planned up what we gonna do.”

For a moment a little worry came on Ma's face. “Ain't you gonna stay with us—with the family?” she asked.

“Well, we talked all about it, me an' Connie. Ma, we wanna live in a town” (191).

Things therefore have turned out even worse for her than any expectation as not only does she eventually find herself without her beloved Connie but also her future life plans vanish.

Once again Steinbeck draws our attention to Ma's eyes, which seem to be as eloquent as her words: her eyesight is never blank indeed it never stops, differently from her daughter whose eyes seem instead to be always veiled by a melancholic veneer. In this regard it is interesting to see how Rose has been portrayed in Ford's movie; actually there is little similarity between Steinbeck's and Ford's character, interpreted by Dorris Bowdon. Indeed we could say that in the movie Rose appears almost like a non-character: she barely speaks, her condition does not allow her to be a great help in the family and never speaks out. Moreover, by omitting the final scenes in which she is involved, both physically and emotionally, the movie makes her appear as a dull woman, who has learned nothing from her past experience; in this sense Ford has deprived her of a chance for redemption, of the occasion to demonstrate the viewer that nothing has been left of the 'old' Rose. Therefore, while in the novel Rose eventually emerges as a triumphant self-sacrificial 'heroine', Ford's character has been 'mistreated' in favor of the movie's rhythm.

1.3 - MA JOAD AS THE FAMILY TOTEM: WHEN A WOMAN TAKES THE EXECUTIVE POWER WITHIN THE FAMILY TO DEFEND UNITY

One of the most interesting aspects of Ma Joad is the fact that she holds different roles within the novel. She is both the wise master of the heroine-in-making Rose of Sharon and the bonding leader of the family. As I have previously noted, no one in the family has helped Rose of Sharon in becoming a woman in toto like she did and no one has fought so vehemently against dissolution of the Joad family; everybody respects her role and her opinions are particularly valued. She dominates the narration but also stands out as the emotional anchor of the family and indeed we witness several moments in which her inner balance alternates between doggedness and decisiveness. No wonder that from the very first chapters we immediately perceive that she “holds the center stage” (McKay 671). She is herself aware of her power to determine the mood of the family, of her being such a strong totemic figure, therefore she never lets anxiety or fear prevail and this has made her essential within the familiar dynamics:

But better than joy was calm. Imperturbability could be depended upon. And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess. She seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone (86).

Much has been said and written about Ma’s peculiar ‘imperturbability’ and yet this seems to be one of those terms that may baffle the Italian reader as far as the original meaning is concerned. By confronting the more recent translation by Sergio C. Perroni (2013) with Carlo Coardi’s (1940) we can see a different rendering of these few lines.

“Ma meglio della gioia era l’equilibrio. Il senso della misura dà affidamento. E il grande e umile ruolo di Ma’ in seno alla famiglia le aveva conferito dignità e una nitida, equilibrata bellezza. Il suo ruolo di risanatrice aveva dato alle sue mani sicurezza, nerbo, sapienza; il ruolo di arbitro l’aveva resa remota e infallibile come una dea. Sembrava sapere che se lei avesse vacillato, l’intera famiglia avrebbe tremato, e che se un giorno si fosse trovata a cedere

o a disperare davvero, l'intera famiglia sarebbe crollata, avrebbe smarrito ogni volontà di funzionare" (Perroni 105).

"Ma più balsamica che la gioia era la calma che palesava. La famiglia sapeva di poter contare sull'imperturbabilità della mamma. E dall'alta, umile posizione che occupava in casa, ella aveva derivato dignità, e una nitida, calma bellezza. Dalle loro funzioni risanatrici le sue mani avevano derivato sicurezza, freschezza ed efficienza. Nelle sue funzioni di arbitro ell'era diventata remota ed infallibile come una dea. Si rendeva conto che se vacillava lei, la famiglia tremava; se lei tentennava o disperava, la famiglia crollava" (Coardi 84).

Considering that 'imperturbability' is a term describing someone who is "not easily upset or worried by a difficult situation, calm"⁸ I deem Perroni's translation with "senso della misura" rather distant from what Steinbeck had in mind. Despite Ma Joad's undeniable common sense, this is not a synonym for "imperturbability" nor is "equilibrio" for "calm": it is not that they are misleading or completely wrong but they render the original meaning only partially. This is one of those examples, few to tell the truth, in which the earliest translation seems to be more precise than the latest one. As a matter of fact what characterizes Ma Joad is her calm attitude toward the events of life, that is, a serenity which seems to protect her from despair. It is also interesting to note how Steinbeck compares Ma to a goddess when it comes to her rational common sense, defining her "as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess." It is clear how the author wanted to stress her extraordinary personality and her being so irreplaceable and because of her being the "citadel of the family" and "goddess-like" she seems to descend in the narration as a sort of *deus ex machina*, sent to earth to keep unity and balance; and yet this link would definitely not pass unnoticed by more attentive readers: in Rose's description, her hair was wrapped to form a sort of crown that makes her look like a young queen. Since the very beginning both Ma and Rose are therefore different if compared with the other characters and stand on a different level because of their particular aura. Curiously enough the author reinforced the idea of Ma's being so irreplaceable by saying that "the family would fall" without her, which is possibly even more emphasized by both Italian translators with their use of the verb 'crollare'; this is a very striking image because in case

⁸ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

she leaves there is no possibility of ‘resurrection’ for the other family members. Furthermore, the way in which Ma Joad, and her daughter subsequently, emerge in this novel should make us reflect about the sensitivity and respects that Steinbeck had toward women. It is not a mere coincidence that he decided to entrust a woman with the role of family’s “citadel” nor the fact that she is engaged in some of the most intense and poignant dialogues of the novel or that Pa Joad is always unable to make his masculine prowess and authority prevail within the family, especially whenever he has a confrontation with his wife. The scene in which Ma refuses Pa Joad’s plan to momentarily split the group is exemplary:

“I ain’t a-gonna go,” she said.

“I tell you, you got to go. We made up our mind.”

And now Ma’s mouth set hard. She said softly, “On’y way you gonna get me to go is whup me.” She moved the jack handle gently again. “An’ I’ll shame you, Pa. I won’t take no whuppin’, cryin’ an’ a-beggin’. I’ll light into you. An’ you ain’t so sure you can whup me anyways. An’ if ya do get me, I swear to God I’ll wait till you got your back turned, or you’re settin’ down, an’ I’ll knock you belly-up with a bucket. I swear to Holy Jesus’ sake I will.” [...] The jack handle flicked hungrily back and forth in Ma’s hand. “Come on,” said Ma. “You made up your mind. Come on an’ whup me. Jus’ try it. But I ain’t a-goin’; or if I do, you ain’t gonna get no sleep, ‘cause I’ll wait an’ I’ll wait, an’ jus’ the minute you take sleep in your eyes, I’ll slap ya with a stick a stove wood.”

The whole group watched the revolt. [...] And in a moment the group knew that Ma had won. And Ma knew it too (196-197).

Although she becomes a fury when she gets mad we also know that she does so not because of her bad temperament but because she places family unity before any personal interest. In a time where people are doomed to suffering and starvation because of the greed of an economic system based on individual self-interest Steinbeck, through Ma Joad, suggests a possible alternative and a humanitarian choice based on collectivity as potential power. Ma’s *raison d’être* realizes itself at its best when plural and this is proved by the fact that she is always portrayed in the act of doing something for the other, be it preparing meals, taking care of the family members or helping other fellow people; she furthermore does not suggest anything without considering the whole group because she is “a woman so great with love.”⁹

It is interesting to note how many times Steinbeck draws the reader’s attention to Ma’s smile

⁹ Casey during a conversation with Uncle John, commenting Ma being awake all night to stand by Grandma.

and eyes. Her eyes are often more eloquent than her words and so is her mouth: it is as if they were extensions of her character. Yet these details are not always rendered, and as far as Coardi's translation is concerned, they sometimes are substituted by redundant periphrases. The above mentioned excerpt begins with: "And now Ma's mouth set hard. She said softly"; yet Coardi translates as such: "allora la mamma assunse un espressione di ostinatezza che nessuno le aveva mai visto in volto, ma disse con la massima calma" (186). This is an example of Coardi's 'style', who instead of simple rendering it with "allora la bocca di Ma si contrasse. Disse piano" (237) like Perroni did, he reinterprets the sentence. By doing so, the strong contrast between the rigidity of Ma's mouth and her low voice disappears in the multitude of unnecessary words.

II.

From 'I' to 'We'

2.1 - MA JOAD AND ROSE OF SHARON: FROM SELF-COMMITMENT TO “OTHER-COMMITMENT”¹⁰

There is no doubt that Steinbeck intended this novel as a mean to give voice to the multitude and even clearer is the antithesis between the individualism and egoism of the company owners and of the economic system as a whole and the solidarity and humanity characterizing the migrant families. This collectivistic spirit that dominates the novel is always evident and it is emphasized by the impressive repetition of the word “people”. This collectivity and faith in the power of cooperation among people sharing a common destiny is brought forward in this novel equally by men and women. Be it political engagement or the care of the family, all the characters act according to a very typical human behavior: in harsh times the awareness of not being alone acquires almost a saving importance being it one of the few certainties to hold on to in order not to succumb. The roles’ division in this gendered system is well defined, therefore men are usually seen working, or trying to do it at least, and are excited by the new socialistic wave that is spreading all over America and are ready to join forces to fight for their own rights whereas women are given the traditional task of keeping the family ‘going’. Yet if we consider the vicissitudes within the Joad family we realize that eventually the only ‘winning’ role is the one represented by Ma Joad and by her daughter. It is her figure that will fill the void represented by the revolutionary ambition of her son Tom, her husband Pa Joad and Jim Casy, whose political ideas, although undeniably right and strongly supported, will lead to nowhere, if not in tragedy. As Nellie Y. McKay has noted, Ma Joad, as representative of all-family women, “is never an individual in her own right” (666), she endures class discrimination and very rationally understands that the cell of the family is too feeble and too

¹⁰ The term “other-commitment” is a neologism invented by John Ditsky. I will appropriate hereafter this word for its aptitude in rendering at best the idea of completely dedicate oneself to the ones who desperately need help.

little to face the unfair system the men want to overthrow. Yet it would be incorrect to imagine her as a close-minded and dull woman; indeed, she might well be a not highly educated person but she has never discouraged the family men when they failed in doing something nor has she ever let her clear-headedness and rationality be overwhelmed by despair. We cannot but praise her exemplary attitude toward her husband, for example: Pa Joad is aware of his inability to exert his role of head of the family and the fact that everyone relies on his wife when searching for a ‘resolute’ point of view or important decisions desolates him. Yet in Ma’s words there are never derisive intentions or attempts to put the blame on him. Her steadiness and pragmatism do not imply that she is not a dreamer; on the contrary she initially had great expectations, but what marks her as ‘different’ is her being a ‘rational-dreamer’, a trait that will eventually turn out to be one of her strengths:

“That'd be nice work, Tom, pickin' peaches. Even if they wouldn't let you eat none, you could maybe snatch a little ratty one sometimes. An' it'd be nice under the trees, workin' in the shade. I'm scared of stuff so nice. I ain't got faith. I'm scared somepin ain't so nice about it. [...] But I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place, an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder—that is, if we all get jobs an' all work—maybe we can get one of them little white houses. An' the little fellas go out an' pick oranges right off the tree” (105).^{11 12}

Ma knows that nobody receives anything for free and all this well-being and wealth that many farmer people like them hope to find in this sort of El Dorado seem to her more an utopia than a real possibility. She embodies the rock of the family but this does not mean that she is fear-free. Yet if we confront this excerpt with Coardi’s translation her being “scared” disappears:

¹¹ Right before leaving Ma confides with her son Tom her expectations and perplexities about the forthcoming journey. Tom tries to hearten her mother and exhorts her to optimism.

¹² “Lavoro pulito, non ti pare? E anche se è proibito mangiar frutta, non diran niente se si dà un morso almeno a quella guasta. E poi è un lavoro che si fa all’ombra, al fresco. Alle volte mi viene il dubbio perché mi pare esagerato tutto il bene che se ne dice.” [...] “ma non posso fare a meno di pensare a come si deve stare bene, laggiù in California. Mai freddo e frutti dappertutto. E la gente vive in casine bianche tra gli aranci. Chi sa se potremo procurarcene una anche noi; e perché no, se troviamo tutti lavoro? Anche i bambini possono fare la loro parte laggiù, ci vuol poco a staccare gli aranci dal ramo: è un divertimento” (Coardi 101-102-103).

“Dev’essere un bel lavoro raccogliere le pesche, Tom. Pure se non te lasciano mangiare, magari ogni tanto te ne puoi pigliare una un po’ guastata. E dev’essere bello lavorare in mezzo agli alberi, coll’ombra. Mi spaventa la roba così bella. Non mi fido. Mi spavento che alla fine c’è qualcosa di brutto.” [...] “ma a me piace pensare a quant’è bello in California. Non fa mai freddo. E c’è frutta dappertutto, e la gente sta in posti bellissimi, piccole case bianche in mezzo agli aranci. Magari - dico, se ci pigliano a lavorare e lavoriamo tutti quanti - magari ce la troviamo pure noi una di quelle piccole case bianche. Così l’arance i bambini se le vanno a pigliare proprio sugli alberi” (Perroni 128-129).

“[...] e poi è un lavoro che si fa all’ombra, al fresco. Alle volte mi viene il dubbio perché mi pare esagerato tutto il bene che se ne dice” (102).

The translator has been unable to render Ma’s genuine feeling of fear and misleadingly interpreted it instead as a mere “dubbio.” Unfortunately this is not a doubt but rather the anxiety for an ‘enterprise’ that in her mind, like an omen seems almost already doomed. Then better to use the idea of group, of ‘people’ to do something good and help fellow mates without the commendable but less realistic hope to change the system. This is just what Ma Joad does throughout the novel: by creating a web of mutual support, she manages to guarantee a certain stability to the group.

Thus if men direct their efforts toward the search for a job and political fight, Ma Joad fulfills her being a woman by devoting herself to the ‘outer world’. In this sense she stands for all those women whose value is expressed not in self-realization but rather in the way they can benefit the group. Yet it is right at the very end of the novel that her philosophy is made manifest, when she thanks a woman neighbor, who offered her help during Rose of Sharon’s labor:

Ma fanned the air slowly with her cardboard. “You been frien'ly,” she said. “We thank you.”
The stout woman smiled. “No need to thank. Ever'body's in the same wagon. S'pose we was down. You'd a give us a han'.”
“Yes,” Ma said, “we would.”
“Or anybody.”
“Or anybody. 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” (525).¹³

¹³ La mamma continuava meccanicamente a sventagliare. “Avete fatto molto. Vi ringraziamo.”
“Non c’è bisogno di ringraziamenti. Siamo tutti nello stesso carro. Fossi io in difficoltà, mi dareste una mano. Una volta, si pensava solo alla propria famiglia, ma adesso, con le cose che vanno sempre peggio, c’è sempre più da fare” (Coardi 463).

Ma’ smosse piano l’aria col suo pezzo di cartone. “E’ stata buona con noi,” disse “E io la ringrazio col cuore.”
La tozza donnetta sorrise. “non c’è niente da ringraziare. Siamo tutti sulla stessa barca. Metti che stavamo male noi. Non ci davate una mano?”
“Sì,” disse Ma’, “ve la davamo sì”.
“Come a tutti quanti.”
“Come a tutti quanti. Prima contava solo la famiglia. Ora no. Ora contano tutti quanti. Peggio stiamo e più tocca che ci diamo da fare” (Perroni 619).

It is the dramatic situation that leads Ma Joad to fully dedicate herself to others: her passage from ‘self-commitment’ to ‘other-commitment’ can be silently noticed at the very beginning of the novel when Ma, before leaving Sallisaw, alone in her room sets fire to some of her past belongings. This is an important turning point for her, as from that moment on she becomes fully aware that her own ‘I’ will be realized through charity and devotion to the family and humbly realizes that her duty amounts to being always present to avoid the rupture of the Joad clan. This moment is very touching and rich in references: in saying goodbye to her past and to all her certainties she heads toward ‘the golden state’ of California bringing with her just gold items.

She picked up a lantern and walked heavily into the bedroom, and her bare feet made no sound on the floor. [...] She glanced about the stripped room. Nothing was left in it except trash. [...] Ma set her lantern on the floor. She reached behind one of the boxes that had served as chairs and brought out a stationery box, old and soiled and cracked at the corners. She sat down and opened the box. Inside were letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little gold signet ring, and a watch chain braided of hair and tipped with gold swivels. She touched the letters with her fingers, touched them lightly, and she smoothed a newspaper clipping on which there was an account of Tom's trial.[...] She bit her lower lip, thinking, remembering. And at last she made up her mind. She picked out the ring, the watch charm, the earrings, dug under the pile and found one gold cuff link. She took a letter from an envelope and dropped the trinkets in the envelope. [...] Then she stood up, took her lantern, and went back into the kitchen. She lifted the stove lid and laid the box gently among the coals (126).

In the Italian version, Perroni has rendered this scene at best; every word has been maintained, nothing has been omitted and we may therefore assert that in this case the original and the translated version match perfectly. It is interesting the refined use of “ciarpame” for “trash”, instead of the more colloquial “spazzatura”, while in Coardi’s translation this line is nowhere to be seen.¹⁴

¹⁴ “Pese una lanterna e si avviò pesantemente verso la stanza da letto, e i suoi piedi nudi non facevano rumore sul pavimento. [...] Si guardò intorno nella stanza ormai spoglia. Non c’era più niente, solo ciarpame. [...] Mò poso la lanterna sul pavimento. Infilò la mano dietro una delle casse che avevano usato come sedie e tirò fuori una vecchia scatola di cartone, sudicia e con gli spigoli rincagliati. Si sedette per terra e apri la scatola. Dentro c’erano lettere, ritagli, fotografie, un paio di orecchini, un piccolo anello d’oro, e una catena da orologio fatta di crini intrecciati stretti da due puntali d’oro. Tocco le l lettere con la punta delle dita,le tocco piano, e liscio un ritaglio di giornale in cui si dava conto del processo di Tom. [...] Si morse il labbro inferiore, pensando, ricordando. Infine prese una decisione. [...] Sfilò una lettera da una busta e ripose i ninnoli nella busta. [...] Allora si alzò in

This scene represents a cross-road in Ma Joad's life, that turns her from ordinary wife and mother to iron woman and family pillar. Rose of Sharon as well will undergo a similar process and as a matter of fact, although within the narration she is mainly remembered for her shy and naïve character, there is a crucial scene to which the reader should pay attention:

She got up and went inside the tent. She came out and stood in front of Rose of Sharon, and she held out her hand. "Look!" The small gold earrings were in her hand. "These is for you." The girl's eyes brightened for a moment, and then she looked aside. "I ain't pierced."
"Well, I'm a-gonna pierce ya."
[...]
"You oughta been pierced long ago," said Ma. She looked at the girl's face, and she smiled in triumph. "Now get them dishes all done up. Your baby gonna be a good baby. Very near let you have a baby without your ears was pierced. But you're safe now."
"Does it mean somepin?"
"Why, 'course it does," said Ma. "'Course it does" (418).

Coardi and Perroni translate as follows:

S'alzò, andò sotto la tenda e ne tornò fuori dopo mezzo minuto andando a piantarsi davanti alla figlia: "Guarda cos'ho in mano." Erano gli orecchini d'oro, "Te li do."
Gli occhi di Rosa Tea luccicarono per un instante, poi la ragazza distolse lo sguardo. "Non ho i buchi," mormorò.
"Te li faccio io," disse la mamma.
[...]
"Avrei dovuto bucarteli prima, ma ad ogni modo adesso è fatto. Su, finisci quei piatti ora, e vedrai che avrai un amore di bambino" (267-368).

Si alzò ed entrò nella tenda. Tornò fuori, si piazzò davanti a Rose of Sharon, e tese la mano verso di lei. "Guarda!" Nel palmo aveva i suoi piccoli orecchini d'oro. "Sono per te."
Gli occhi della ragazza s'illuminarono per un istante, poi si rivolsero altrove. "Non ho i buchi alle orecchie."
"Be', ora te li buco io."
[...]

piedi, prese la lanterna e tornò in cucina. Tolsse il coperchio del fornello e posò con delicatezza la scatola tra le braci. Il calore annerì rapidamente il cartone. Una fiamma guizzò e lambì la scatola" (Perroni 153).

"Prese la lanterna e s'avviò pesantemente nella stanza da letto senza fare il minimo rumore coi piedi nudi sul pavimento. [...] dette un'occhiata circolare alla stanza sguernita. Non c'era più niente. [...] Posò la lanterna a terra. Da una delle cassette che serviva anche da sgabello trasse una cartella, di quelle che servono alla corrispondenza; decrepita, sudicia, slabbrata negli angoli. Si sedette e l'aprì. Conteneva vecchie lettere, fotografie, cartoline illustrate, un paio d'orecchini, un sigillo d'oro e una catenina d'orologio. Palpò leggermente le lettere una ad una, e liscìò un ritaglio di giornale che dava il resoconto del processo di Tom. [...], mordicchiandosi il labbro inferiore immersa nei ricordi. Alfine si scosse [...]. Mise questi oggetti in una busta, la piegò e la ripose nella tasca del vestito. Poi chiusa la cartella e la liscìò ancora una volta con tenerezza. Finalmente s'alzò, riprese la lanterna e tornò in cucina. Aprì lo sportello della stufa e posò dolcemente la cartella sui tizzoni ardenti. Subito il calore annerì la carta e una fiamma si sprigionò per lambirla" (Coardi 119-120).

“E’ da un pezzo che te le dovevamo bucare,” disse Ma’. Guardò il viso della ragazza e fece un sorriso di trionfo. “Ora spicciati a sistemare i piatti. Il tuo bambino verrà benone. A momenti lasciavamo che facevi un figlio senza che t’avevamo bucatato le orecchie. Ma ora puoi stare tranquilla.”

“Servono per il bambino?”

“Eccome se servono,” disse Ma’. “Servono sì” (492-493).

This scene has to be read as a rite of passage, a sort of initiation for the young girl. Ma gives her daughter the gold earrings she had treasured for the whole journey: now she is not alone anymore as the representative of the ‘socialism of sentiments’ led by women and by piercing Rose of Sharon’s ears, Ma appoints her daughter as her successor. In Rose’s question “Does it mean somepin?” and Ma’s answering “Course it does” it seems that the two have already understood the importance of this act, even though we will witness Rose’s ascent to her highest level of maturity and altruism only at the end of the novel. Yet this closing exchange has been totally ignored in Coardi’s translation. By closing the scene with “Avrei dovuto bucarteli prima, ma ad ogni modo adesso è fatto”, the translator reduces everything to a mere aesthetic procedure and seems not to contemplate the fact that what Ma Joad did has a great symbolic meaning and it is not only a matter of ‘beauty’. Yet we are dealing with an undeniably ambiguous question that offers material for many interpretations because the pronoun “it” refers to a non-specified ‘what’. Perroni indeed paraphrases Rose’s question by giving his own more logical interpretation to make it more univocal: “Servono per il bambino?”

Furthermore Coardi’s translation also lacks in delicacy when Ma, offering Rose her earrings, exclaims: “Te li do” instead of a more appropriate “Sono per te” as Perroni suggests, which makes Ma’s gesture appear more as a disinterested offer than a precious gift. In regard to it, also Ma’s triumphant final smile has been omitted, which I frankly deem as a bad oversight considering the fact that throughout the narration Steinbeck draws the reader’s attention to Ma’s mouth very frequently, be it smiling or sulking. Noteworthy is also Ma’s reassurance

“But you're safe now”; This assertion of hers sounds almost mysterious because it seems that the girl's non pierced ears represent a ‘problem’ or a serious condition that needs a solution, thus at this point the baffled reader might be wondering what now is Rose safe from.

Steinbeck's choice to insert this earring scene in the narration is interesting; of course this is definitely not a meaningless act, not only because of the above mentioned reasons but also because this is an ancient traditional procedure, rich in cultural meanings in many countries worldwide. Ear piercing, especially among women, is still today one of the most common forms of body alteration and was primarily practiced for adornment purposes or for a display of wealth. It has been often considered as a rite of passage and therefore adolescent girls or brides-to-be used to have had their ears pierced. As far as Northern American tradition is concerned, “in the US ear piercing began to lose popularity in the 1920s with the advent of clip-on earrings, but became popular again beginning in the 1960s, primarily with women and girls” (DeMello 94). Women therefore used to have their ears pierced by their own mother or by family women by means of a common needle sterilized with fire. This is exactly what happened with Rose and Ma is curiously surprised of not having thought about it before, so much so that she seems almost relieved after that. We cannot say with certainty whether Ma's relief in having got rid of this ‘burden’ has to do with her superstitious beliefs or if this is something belonging to a woman's tradition, according to which a woman is ‘incomplete’ without ear piercings. By the way the whole scene appears almost mysterious: it is obvious that there is more than a mere ear piercing and still its meaning is not so clear; the reader is left the task to imagine what is hidden behind this gift and the following events will definitely offer many hints to reflect about it. From this scene on, Rose's progress toward maturity and full adulthood gains speed and, like a prophetic sign, Ma Joad's act once again comes in perfect timing: shortly after, in the same chapter, we witness a dramatic string of events namely, Jim Casy's murder by a strike-breaker and Tom's striking back and killing him; now Tom is a wanted man and the family has to leave the government camp as soon as possible.

2.2 - FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO SOCIALISM

If we had to choose a word that could resume the essence of the novel that would be 'conversion'. Steinbeck's novel is an unrelenting sequence of conversions, that have to be interpreted as evolutions, changes and mental revolutions. The message of the novel itself lies in the hope for a conversion. Considering the focus of this dissertation is inevitable to observe this aspect from the Joad women's point of view, who definitely represent the best perspective to analyze this issue. *The Grapes of Wrath* is undoubtedly a dynamic text: the novel does not develop and end in the most conventional way nor would we ever expect the inner transformations the characters undergo. Moreover Steinbeck has started from the 'detail' to broaden it to the 'general', that is, he does not just celebrate the exodus of the Joad family per se, but rather he elevates it to emblem of thousands of American families and likewise the Joads revised approach toward life and human relationships reflects Steinbeck's hope for the whole country. If we add the fact that these themes have to be contextualized within the American political scene of the 1930s, it is easy to understand the cold and unfriendly reaction to the newly published book by the national establishment and by the most conservative critics. So much so that its publication in Italy in 1940 by the publishing house Bompiani was considered a hazard because of the book's anti-fascist contents and, easy to foresee, it eventually resulted in a martyred text, characterized by omissions and censored parts. The 'revolutionary' message of the novel is in fact rather clear, both in the interchapters, where the author's voice may seem to be heard, and in dialogues. According to Stephen Railton *The Grapes of Wrath* is a novel about an old system dying and a new one beginning to take root" (27) and indeed everything in this novel is changing into something new, as a result of more conscious choices: the abandoning of a quiet past and the beginning of a new uncertain reality, the characters who elaborate a different perception of mankind, and the spreading of a new political vision opposed to a traditional one. Steinbeck leaves men the

role of representing the political fight to replace the traditional American capitalistic system, so much traditional as damaging and individualistic, with a new system based on a socialistic democracy that guarantees a diffused well-being and general equity. So, if men are more representative of a change outside the family, women stand for the humanitarian-socialistic change within the family. Women experience a change that possibly is less evident and manifest than that of their men but with more dramatic effects.

As the journey proceeds the reader can perceive a different idea of family in *Ma Joad*; if at the beginning of the novel Ma promises herself to defend and maintain the unity of the Joad family she then realizes that it is necessary to open the familiar boundaries to survive and cope with difficulties. Ma actually mirrors initially what can be defined as the typical American faith in individuality, in this case the preservation of the close cell of the family as a singular entity: of course she does it for the sake of its members but also because of the belief that by reinforcing the boundaries from external forces there are higher chances to succeed. This is why Ma seems to enclose the family in a huge embrace and tries to soothe various rebellious attempts by its members: dispossessed and with nothing to rely on, the family is their only certainty left. However the initial self-reliance of Emersonian tradition and hope to start a new life, which brought them to head toward California, will soon be replaced by a much less appealing reality. But when reality seems to deny every expectation, it becomes necessary to change all the initial assumptions and revise the idea of family by contemplating the saving power of collectivity and kinship. They realize that sometimes blood may not be thicker than water as they understand that when shared with fellow people, even if not related, adversities appear less insurmountable. This dialogue between Ma Joad and Sairy Wilson, a woman the Joads come to meet along the road and who offered her and her husband's tent to let Grampa rest awhile, sounds as a declaration of intents.

[Ma]... "We'll wrop 'im in your quilt. We'll make it up to you. We got a quilt for you."

Sairy said, "You shouldn't talk like that. We're proud to help. I ain't felt so—safe in a long time. People needs—to help."

Ma nodded. "They do," she said (165).

"Dovreste lasciarmi questa coperta per avvolgervi il nonno, ve ne do un'altra. Ce n'ho una da darvi."

"Non parlate così. Siamo contenti d'aver potuto esservi d'aiuto E' da tanto che non mi sento così ben, s'ha sempre bisogno d'aiutarsi l'un l'altro"

"E' vero"convenne la mamma (Coardi 157).

"Ora con questa coperta ci c'involtiamo Nonno. E a voi ve ne diamo una nostra."

Sairy disse: "Se lo fa m'offendo. Per noi è un piacere aiutarvi. Era da un pezzo che non mi sentivo così...in pace. Tutti quanti abbiamo bisogno d'aiutarci".

Mà annuì. "E' vero," disse (Perroni 198).

The Joads started their enterprise with enthusiasm and optimism but it is when they realize that they are just one among many and that their sufferings are the sufferings of all that the shift happens. Now women are not offering themselves just to their own family anymore but to all "Manself", that is, to all individual in need of help, be it other migrant families met during the journey or hungry kids in the government camps, up to the most extreme form of self-sacrifice with Rose of Sharon offering her breast to a dying man. Yet Ma Joad and Rosasharn come to this conversion through different experiences we could describe as epiphanic: while it is the death of her child that brings Rose to generate life otherwise, it has been remarked that "one of the ways that Ma is made to change in the course of her pilgrimage is by replacing her acquired faith in God and the next world with the belief in the people and in this life that she gradually learns from Casy" (Railton 38). In a world dominated by misery and injustices where faith in God seems to bring little comfort one can find hope and courage by working 'here and now' and offering help to whoever needs it. In this sense Ma Joad and Rose have demonstrated that "Manself" can give itself new purposes and by changing one can survive through the adversities of life.

As far as the movie is concerned, the viewer can perceive that Ford's approach to the relationship between socialism and individualism has been handled in comparison with the

novel. We may say that the socialist element has been penalized in favor of the story, thus, the attention is mainly focused on the Joads as a family and on their characters, whereas there is little reference to the outer world, namely to the Dust Bowl, the fellow people they come to meet, the present American social situation or even the agrarian past of the Joads; even the socialist effort in which all the Joads are engaged is little mentioned. In this sense Ford's interest is rather limited to the Joad characters and this results in a very reduced connection with the land or with society; we may say that the movie is characterized by a perspective that is opposite to the that of the novel therefore what Steinbeck narrated through a 'social' view is described through an 'individual' view in Ford's movie. As a matter of fact this family seems to live in a isolated and barely real reality, with very little connections with space or time; only at the beginning the reader is provided with social-economic pieces of information, thanks to Muley's character, who describes the reason why many families were forced to leave their houses through a flashback. However, if it was not for the novel we would not know with accuracy when does the story take place or what is the characters' background. Yet as I have already remarked the most important difference is the absence in the movie of the 'ideological' component, especially when it comes to the kind of socialism led by women, which is so evident especially in the omission of the final scenes with Rose. The political aspect enjoys instead a considerable attention as we can deduce from Ford's decision to include Jim Casy's dramatic encounter with the deputies or Tom's dialogue with Ma, two scenes with a strong political component.

2.3 - CAN INNER CHANGE BRING SOCIAL CHANGE?

It is difficult to establish the kind of message Steinbeck wanted to convey by narrating the Joads' exodus: considering the intensity of the spiritual change that Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon have experienced we may assume that the novel has a strong hopeful moral. However, it curiously ends with the puzzling word "mysteriously" (536) and also the author's point of view about the events is not so univocal. Although Steinbeck must have had a deep esteem in women's potential and, more generally, in the human capability to change in the name of survival, there is no hint within the text about his actually trusting the fact that people inner changes could affect social changes. This uncertainty is due to the fact that the relative success of the Joad women in opening the close cell of the family to the outer world and in guaranteeing at the same time their necessary and comforting presence collides with men's failure. As far as both work and social revolution are concerned therefore, the story can appear extremely tragic or optimistic depending on the perspective from which we analyze the events.

First of all Steinbeck by giving women the task of directing the family toward a future of cohesion and kinship in a time in which women were only supposed to be wives and mothers and making them appear as heroines of a socialism built on brotherhood honors the 'gender'. Yet the issue about what effects this may have on a broader horizon remains pending. The story points to real events and there is no doubt that, according to the author, American society needed to be completely reorganized, and yet what baffles the reader are the limits of people's inner change. When inner change is limited to a specific social group it might have a huge influence in relationships among fellow people, but it hardly has such a strong impact in political life or in social revolution.

Destitution and injustices have led Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon among others to work on themselves and change their attitudes toward humanity but actually this had no effects outside

their extended family: California is not the dream place they thought, work opportunities and salaries are extremely scarce, solidarity does not exist outside government camps, the political fight for a socialist-democratic change in America seems a fight against windmills. Therefore if we stick to the contents of the novel, a shared impression is that the sufferings and struggles of this family will not have consequences on future generations because the evil of society will hardly be defeated just through an inner change, all the more so if this happens among poor farmer people whose voices seem to have very little resonance. Steinbeck however, to make his personal viewpoint clear, stated in one of his rare interviews to his San Francisco Chronicles journalist friend Joseph Henry Jackson that:

I admire them [*the migrant people, nds*]. Because they are brave, because although the technique of their life is difficult and complicated, they meet it with increasing strength, because they are kind, humorous and wise, because their speech has the metaphor and flavor and imagery of poetry, because they can resist and fight back and because I believe that out of those qualities will grow a new system and a new life which will be better than anything we had before. (542-543).

Yet if on a social and economic level Steinbeck's optimistic faith may be lacking in realism, the novel conveys instead a triumphant image of women. In the end women are the ones who have kept the family tight and whose inner rebirth has brought calm to wrath, countering indifference with self-sacrifice. Moreover they have also showed the meaning of democracy in action by lending their hands to whoever needed help and receiving it in return. They stand out because they have immediately understood how poverty makes people less selfish and more cooperative; indeed after having travelled for many miles and having met plenty of people Ma Joad realizes that only poor people like the Joads are to be looked for help:

"I'm learnin' one thing good," she said. "Learnin' it all a time, ever' day. If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help—the only ones" (444).¹⁵

¹⁵ "La sto imparando ogni momento, tutti i giorni. Quando stai male o magari hai bisogno o sei nei guai ... v'è dalla povera gente. Soltanto loro ti danno una mano ... soltanto loro" (Perroni 522).

Ma Joad's resentful reaction to a shopkeeper makes us reflect about the fact that for that part of population willing to change and help others there will always be another part still anchored to its own richness and that obviously has no interest in changing for a more equitable distribution of wealth and a better living for all social classes and corresponds indeed to soul dryness. It is thus worthwhile to give a look to Coardi's 'imaginative' translation of these lines:

“Imparo tutti i giorni che era proprio vero quel che diceva il nonno: in caso di bisogno, rivolgersi solo alla povera gente, mai ai ricchi” (389).

First of all the translator introduces Grampa for no specific reason and without any particular reference to him by Steinbeck. Moreover not only does Coardi resume the condition of being “in trouble” and “hurt” into the much vaguer phrasing “in caso di bisogno” but he has also possibly deemed the specifying of the reason why one should avoid affluent people when in need as irrelevant. Indeed this observation about rich people is of paramount importance because it supports and encompasses the ‘essence’ of this scene between Ma Joad and the shopkeeper. Therefore if we would stick to Coardi's translation one might as well guess its meaning but he would not know with certainty that Ma's warning to the reader is that one should beware of rich people because they will negate you their help. Ma is not referring to a specific category but to the entire macro group of ‘riches’, be they Californian landowners or the wealthy couples aboard their plush cars that the Joads met at the service stations along Route 66. Yet it is interesting to note that we logically understand that Ma is talking about rich people, and Coardi spells it unequivocally, however she never explicitly uses the word ‘riches’ but refers to them through the contrast with poor people, who “are the only ones that'll help.” Steinbeck presented such characters to mirror the ethical drift caused by richness when it becomes the only value for everything; in this perspective we do not have to imagine the author as a fervid socialist, blinded by the hatred toward private property yet he has noticed that this often leads to social insensitivity.

And all their love was thinned with money, and all their fierceness dribbled away in interest until they were no longer farmers at all, but little shopkeepers of crops, little manufacturers who must sell before they can make. [...] And it came about that owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it. [...] And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians [*the dispossessed, nds*] wanted only two things—land and food; and to them the two were one (272-273, 325).¹⁶

What Steinbeck disdains is the fact that while people like the Joads have never lost their strong bond with the land, there are landowners who do not even know what land is. The Okies have abandoned their lives in search for lands to work: not money or glorious dreams but hard work to live a decent life; the passion they sense for the land goes beyond richness and economic interests as it is in this love that they find dignity. What instead ennoble most of the landowners is the idea of ownership, possession and the prospect of accumulation which enrich the material life but smother the spiritual one. It is to them that the novel addresses its most ferocious critique because it is on them that the migrants' life, like that of the Joads, depends. Considering the passion and the atavistic bond they have for the land it is demeaning and daunting to them seeing how these landowners show no interest whatsoever for what they are trading with, nor for the farmers working on their soils. While farmers love their lands because their stories, knowledge and genealogy are grafted onto the soil, landowners see in the same terrain just property to earn money. Similarly, Steinbeck put the

¹⁶ “E l'amore di quegli esseri umani risultò come intisichito dalla febbre del denaro, e la fierezza della stirpe si sgretolò in interessi; così che tutta quella popolazione risultò di individui che non erano più coloni, ma piccoli commercianti, o piccoli industriali, obbligati a vendere prima di produrre. [...] E accadde che i proprietari non lavorarono più le loro terre. Coltivavano sulla carta; e dimenticarono l'odore della terra, il gusto tattile della zolla sbriciolata tra le mani; ricordarono solo che la possedevano; tennero presente solo la cifra dei guadagni che ne traevano o delle perdite che a causa si essa dovevano subire. [...] E se da una parte i californiani ambiscono molte cose, come accumular sostanze, ascendere la scala sociale, concedersi svaghi e oggetti di lusso, dall'altra i nuovi barbari chiedono due cose sole: terra e nutrimento, che per loro sono una cosa sola” (Perroni 244-255-246).

“E tutto il loro amore s'inaridì in denaro, e tutta la loro tenacia si dissanguò in interessi, finché smisero del tutto di essere agricoltori e diventarono piccolo commercianti di raccolti, piccolo industriali con l'ansia di vendere prima di produrre. [...] E i proprietari smisero di seguire le loro fattorie. Producevano sulla carta; e avevano dimenticato la terra, il suo odore e il suo contatto, e ricordavano solo che la possedevano, ricordavano solo i guadagni o le perdite che gli procurava. [...] E mentre i californiani volevano molte cose - prosperità, successo sociale, divertimento, lusso, e un'astuta stabilità bancaria - i nuovi barbari volevo solo due cose: terra e cibo; e per loro queste due cose erano un'unica cosa” (Perroni 322-323).

middle-class tourists heading westward on holiday or for leisure activities on their same dismal level:

Languid, heat-raddled ladies, small nucleuses about whom revolve a thousand accouterments: creams, ointments to grease themselves, coloring matter in phials [...]. Lines of weariness around the eyes, lines of discontent down from the mouth, breasts lying heavily in little hammocks, stomach and thighs straining against cases of rubber. And the mouths panting, the eyes sullen, disliking sun and wind and earth, resenting food and weariness, hating time that rarely makes them beautiful and always makes them old.

Beside them, little pot-bellied men in light suits and panama hats; clean, pink men with puzzled, worried eyes, with restless eyes (180).¹⁷

The ‘failure’ of which Steinbeck and his characters are talking about has to do with the inability of these people to give a sense to their life if not through the reassuring feeling coming from economic superiority and social status. They are “hungry for security and yet sensing its disappearance from the earth” (180), that is why they find comfort in money and in ownership as lasting goods. Yet the Joads’ resentment is not led by envy or frustrations but rather by their total lack of passion for what they are doing, just blinded by an obsession for the possession of things; furthermore they are anything but “small nucleuses” of society meaning by that that this small group is taking decisions for the whole country: people depend on their property and on their investments. These people are not described through very flattering adjectives; especially when he describes the middle-class couple, Steinbeck describes them using adjectives and expressions that make them appear almost like caricatures, grotesque representations of themselves. Their description even gets ironic

¹⁷ “Matrone languide, disfatte dal caldo, bambolone di lusso munite di creme unguenti coloranti in fiale [...]. Grinze di noia attorno agli occhi, grinze di malcontento ai lati della bocca, gravi poppe cadenti costrette in amache redentrici, epe e cosce costrette in guaine di caucciù. Fiacce corte, sguardi ostili, sguardi risentiti a causa del sole, del vento, del paesaggio, del vitto, del tedio, sguardi che odiano il tempo perché raramente le fa parer belle e sempre le fa parer vecchie. Con loro ometti panciuti in panamino e candide tenute di tela, rosei e puliti dai mobili occhi preoccupati” (Coardi 171).

“Languide donne sfinite dal caldo, piccoli nuclei intorno ai quali gravitano mille accessori: creme, pomate per ungersi, sostanze coloranti in fiale [...]. Rughe di stanchezza intorno agli occhi, righe d’insoddisfazione agli angoli della bocca, seni pesantemente insaccati dentro piccole amache, pance e cosce strizzate da guaine di gomma. E le labbra contratte, occhi gonfi, fastidio per il sole e il vento e il paesaggio, disappunto per il cibo e la stanchezza, odio per il tempo che raramente le fa belle e che sempre le fa vecchie. Accanto a loro, piccoli uomini panciuti in completo leggero e panama chiaro; uomini lindi e rosei, con perplessi e ansiosi, occhi febbrili” (Perroni 217).

elements in Coardi's translation where the women are "matrone languide" e "bambolone di lusso [...] che odiano il tempo perché raramente le fa parer belle e sempre le fa parer vecchie" while their men are "ometti panciuti in panamino" (171).

Despite Steinbeck's measured remarks it is inevitable to think about the social change that the Joads, and the author implicitly, hoped for. If we consider such descriptions together with the social-political engagement, one cannot but sense a feeling of defeat and helplessness because if these people represent what can be called the 'leading' social class, the lower classes have very few means to go ahead with the fight. The experiences of the Joad family leave therefore the reader with the hope that in the future there will be a moment in which the idea of ownership and richness will not be the only value in human relationships, for which one "for three dollars a day" (43) is not ashamed to flatten the lands, and the past figuratively, of many fellow people.

III.

The Achievement of a Completeness

3.1 - TOM'S SOCIALIST POEM

“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 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” (495).

The above dialogue, or better say monologue, is one of those scenes that definitely helped the novel in reaching the status of ‘The great American novel’ due to the fact that in few lines Steinbeck managed to condense one of the most important messages of the novel. Put nearly at the end of the novel, it invites the reader to reflect and review all the events that have happened so far; and yet, exactly because of their countercurrent content these few lines have often been ‘mishandled’ by mainstream critics, the censorship and translators too. Considering the early Italian translation it would be inaccurate to talk about ‘mishandling’ because what we are dealing with is a curious deletion of the whole scene. Here Italian fascist censorship has intervened massively more than in any other scene in the novel and it is easy to understand why; this deletion resulted in the fact that the Italian public astonishingly came to know this monologue only 74 years after the novel’s first publication on the Italian market.

Steinbeck was certainly aware that the publication of this novel would cause inflammatory reactions and in fact he himself declared that “the fascist crowd will try to sabotage this book because it is revolutionary. They try to give it the communist angle” (Railton, 28). Yet it is also interesting to note how the author wanted to convey the idea that this necessary American social revolution could be brought about just with the strength of communally shared ideas without resorting to guns or explicit violence; the only bloody exception is when Tom, blinded by rage, kills with a pick handle the policemen who murdered Jim Casy as he accused them of contributing to children’s starvation and death. Moreover since it is nature

with its rhythms and laws to determine events, Steinbeck seems to declare that “this coming of American revolution is inevitable, organically decreed” (Railton 28), something that is doomed to happen as much as the drought or flood.

This sort of socialist monologue is uttered by Tom, who is hidden in a culvert near the cotton plantation after having killed a ‘strike-breaker’. He reassures his mother who has secretly come to visit him and in his words there is a whole compendium of the socialist-revolutionary political spirit of the entire novel; a political spirit of which Tom, along with Jim Casy, is the main representative in the novel. Although Tom himself thinks he is talking nonsense - “It's jus' stuff I been thinkin' about” - it is in his words that we have the certainty that the ‘I’ has become a ‘we’, that all that the difficulties that the Joads have undergone have not been vain. What we are dealing with here is a poem by all means: there is all the strength and immediacy than only a poem can have, it is a versified promise which keeps staying in the reader’s mind with its numerous repetitions of “I’ll be” and “wherever”.

What Tom is trying to communicate to his mother is that his own identity corresponds to that of the whole mankind now and thus “his individual death and failure will not matter” (Carpenter 571). Tom is beaten by the deputies in charge of breaking the strike but what he receives is more an interior beat than a physical one and it is out of this dramatic experience that a new ‘I’ can come to life. Of course Tom’s manifesto could not be accepted in a country where government was indeed fighting against the further diffusion of such political creed, even though Italian authority unexpectedly did not oppose its publication in order to spread an image of a savage and criminal America. Moreover what is remarkable here is that this dialogue involves the two characters that more than anybody else have stood out as emblems of the two kinds of socialism presented in the novel: different according to gender and methods of realization but similar in the intentions. In a way this is Ma’s witnessing to a first rebirth, which precedes Rose’s. She receives part of Tom’s identity and it is of little

importance whether Ma is aware of this important event or not: what matters is her physical presence, which enables her son to give voice to his own 'philosophy'. The result is in fact a *mise-en-abîme*, as here the image of rebirth, core issue of the text, is subtly 'reduplicated' thanks to Ma's presence; Ma appears in fact as the figure that triggers an 'evolutionary' process, namely Tom's implicit rebirth, be it conscious or unconscious. The reader thus, cannot but recognize that in the novel the idea of rebirth can hardly be disjointed from her character. In this sense Ma's presence is crucial and irreplaceable because she is the only one with whom Tom would share such a declaration and even though she seems bewildered by his words there is no doubt that her unique presence has once again triggered a change in a character's life: she is doing it with Tom, she will do it with Rose and possibly with Pa, too. Moreover, except for political engagement, Ma Joad and Tom come to share in their own way Jim Casy's¹⁸ pragmatic doctrine; according to his credo the significance of a successful strike or the satisfaction of a need or desire is not as important as the struggle of a group of men who want to erase their discontent through action directing their thoughts and efforts considering the whole collectivity rather than the single individual. Tom's monologue condenses all the wrath of the novel, a wrath that affects Ma Joad as well but that she has probably never expressed so openly and that encompasses exemplary circumstances that the Joads have personally experienced. The first sentence Tom utters to his mother - "I'll be all around' in the dark" - perfectly mirrors the condition he is living right in that moment, since he has to live clandestinely to avoid arrest; whereas the following one - "wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat"- tells instead a lot about their distress for not having enough food for the family; in the end "wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy" describes his and Casy's dramatic encounter with the deputies. Moreover Tom declares that he will be all over the place but curiously specifies that this will be "in the dark", using therefore the metaphor of

¹⁸ Close friend of Tom and of the whole Joad family, Jim Casy decides to move with the whole clan to California. A former preacher, he decided to abandon his work determined to search for sanctity in the earthly human experience, especially when collective. He is often consulted and remembered for his wisdom and moral sense.

the darkness to describe his future 'condition'. This does not have to deceive us because the darkness here does not stand for a negative or sinister foreboding but seems rather to refer to the present condition of mankind, until a change takes place. In this perspective, Tom's sentence conjures up Biblical references once again: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (King James Bible, Corinthians 13:12). We cannot say with certainty whether Steinbeck had this passage in mind when writing Tom's monologue or not, still it is fascinating to think in how many Biblical extracts it is possible to discern Tom's portray, especially if we look at him as a 'prophet' in socialistic terms.

However it seems that from this moment on, although things will eventually turn out even worst, a sense of optimism and faith in survival predominates. It is true that from this moment on we witness a climax of misfortunes, from Tom's clandestinity to a disastrous flooding, eventually replaced by an endless drought, and finally the death of Rose of Sharon's baby; yet, maybe thanks to all that the Joads have been through, they prove to have such an indestructible soul, which is made even stronger when one can rely on a group of dependable people. Fears and uncertainties have left room for action and this is the most important teaching one should absorb from this novel.

Although there are no particular distortions it is worthwhile paying attention to the (only) Italian translation of this particular excerpt.

"E così non importa. Perché io ci sarò sempre, nascosto e dappertutto. Sarò in tutti i posti... dappertutto dove ti giri a guardare. Dove c'è qualcuno che lotta per dare da mangiare a chi ha fame, io sarò lì. Dove c'è uno sbirro che picchia qualcuno, io sarò lì. Se Casy aveva ragione allora sarò negli urli di quelli che si ribellano... e sarò nelle risate dei bambini quando hanno fame e sanno che la minestra è pronta. E quando la nostra gente mangerà le cose che ha coltivato e vivrà nelle case che ha costruito... bè, io sarò lì. Capisci? Perdio, sto parlando come Casy. E' che lo penso tutt' il tempo. Certe volte è come se lo vedo."

"Non riesco a capire," disse Ma'. "Non ci riesco."

"Manco io," disse Tom. "E' solo roba che m'è venuta di pensare" (Perroni 584).

Perroni has certainly proceeded with accuracy, only at the very beginning he has presented a translation which, if not 'free', is perhaps a little less literal: "[...] perchè io ci sarò sempre, nascosto e dappertutto. Sarò in tutti i posti... dappertutto dove ti giri a guardare [...]" (584). Perroni has added a few elements like "io ci sarò sempre" and the "dappertutto" as if he wanted to emphasize that Tom's presence will be everywhere and every time, beyond the boundaries of space and time. Metaphorically speaking Tom's identity does not correspond any longer only to his own body, but to all who are striving against injustices and cheering for humble pleasures. Furthermore the repetition of the promise "I'll be there" which echoes like a mantra makes Tom appear like a prophet, a 'revolutionary prophet' we might say; it could not pass unnoticed the allusion to the Emersonian's "Over-Soul"¹⁹, with which Tom's shares the promise of being immortal, vast, immense and beautiful; at this point it becomes plain and clear that the 'omnipresence' Tom is referring to is not physical but undoubtedly ideological. This is proved for example by the fact that the almost besetting presence of the personal pronoun 'I' is very effective because it never translates itself in a more collective 'you' or 'they'. This has not to be intended as an unconscious disavowal of his own socialist ideas; indeed it stresses the sacredness of the individual and of his actions and thus, the importance of an interior renovation within the single individual as the first step to eventually try to change society. Further on, Ma Joad bids her son to come back to the family as soon as the situation is calmed down since Tom has to temporarily part from the family to avoid further trouble.

Here is an interesting confrontation of this latter scene between the three texts:

"An', Tom, later – when it's blowed over, you'll come back. You'll find us?" (496)

"E, Tom, più tardi ... quando non c'è più pericolo, ritorna. Ci troverai?" (Coardi 436)

¹⁹ "The Over-Soul" is an essay by Ralph W. Emerson first published in 1841 that condenses the whole Emersonian philosophy. According to the author the "Over-soul" is an entity, namely an immortal and omnipresent force, behind which the presence of God is hiding and thus, one can find it in every living and non-living element of nature.

“E ... Tom... più avanti, quando si sistema tutto, tu devi tornare da noi. Ce la farai a trovarci?” (Perroni 584)

In the first sentence the most evident elements are the use of the invented past tense “blowed” instead of “blew”, a very common ‘device’ in this novel, and the absence of a modal verb in Ma Joad’s appeal to her son. Surprisingly Coardi has given us a translation which I personally deem superior to his colleague’s one in terms of ‘closeness’ to the text. First of all when Perroni translates “you’ll come back” with “tu devi tornare da noi” he adds a slightly ‘menacing’ undertone to Ma’s exhortation, which is given by the use of “devi” whereas the imperative ‘ritorna’ is the Italian most logical correspondence to the future form of the verb. Secondly Steinbeck did not specify the subject to whom Tom was supposed to come back; that is why Perroni’s addition “da noi” sounds quite excessive. Then, Perroni translates “you’ll find us?” with “ce la farai a trovarci?": it is not completely inappropriate or out of context but it adds another modal verb; he could alternatively have opted for a more ‘fluent’ “riuscirai a trovarci?”. For this reason, Coardi’s rendering of this question with “ci troverai?” is the most adequate translation because it is more literal and emphatic and has a pleasant sound when read in Italian. Moreover there is another reason why the oldest version is in this case more successful than the more recent one and this has to do with what I would call ‘immediacy’. Of course the fruition of a translation partly depends on the ability of the translator to render the text by keeping in mind the context of the scene and the images or messages the author wanted to convey. Here Ma’s words resound like a prayer as she fears that this might be the last encounter with her son; therefore, considering the atmosphere of this scene and its emotional impetus, the use of long questions and sentences damages the immediacy of the scene even more if the translator uses redundant sounds as in “tu devi tornare da noi” in which the series of dental consonants /t/ and /d/ hinders and weights its reading in Italian. Yet there is an important aspect to underline as far as Coardi’s above

mentioned excerpt is concerned: what differentiates it is the fact that it does not follow any particular conversation between Tom and Ma as Tom's speech has been excised.²⁰ This means that Ma's praise is the same in all the versions, yet it appears as 'decontextualized' in Coardi's text and loses therefore its original emphasis.

Finally it is interesting to pay attention to the particular use of 'invented' tenses. Throughout the novel it is very frequent to come across irregular verbs of which the Joads invent the past tense, thus, "blow" becomes "blowed" for example. Unfortunately this particular language - Southern farmers' everyday 'slang', as we could call it - completely disappears in the Italian translation, as it is impossible to render it without giving a distorted image of the characters and making them appear like caricatures of themselves or, worst, regionally inflected boors. Indeed, in terms of linguistic analysis this 'simplified' English tells a lot about the characters and offers us dialogues rich in spontaneity and whose genuineness appears even clearer if compared to the high register and lyric descriptions in the interchapters. What Steinbeck managed to do, was to graphically render a kind of language which only belongs to spoken English and which often identifies a social class, for instance the one the Joads belong to. It is not an archaic language nor a kind of dialect, but rather a colloquial reduction and extreme simplification of the irregularities and grammatical rules characterizing a language and as it often happens, the more the language is impoverished, the more the social influence decreases.

²⁰ Tom rise un po' nervoso: "Mah, forse aveva ragione Casy, e ognuno di noi non ha un'anima propria ma solo un pezzo di anima grande..."

"Ma non capisco, Tom, non so cosa vuoi dire."

"Neanche io lo so; per ora è inutile parlare di progetti. E adesso faresti bene a rientrare."

"Allora prendi il denaro."

Tom esitò ancora un momento. "E va bene," disse poi.

"E, Tom più tardi quando non c'è più pericolo, ritorna. Ci troverai?"

"Certo. Ora è meglio che vai. Dammi la mano" (Coardi 435-436).

3.2 - ROSE OF SHARON AND HER NOT FAILED BIRTH

Whereas all the other characters go through an evolution throughout the novel, this is not the case with Rose of Sharon. Only at the end we come to know a whole new Rose, different from the character we have known up to this moment: it is not accidental that the attention of the very last chapter is entirely focused on her. Not only does the 30th chapter present her from a new perspective, but it also comprises the scene which, along with Casy's murder, represents one of the most symbolic and upsetting moments of the novel. The first one to be narrated is Rose's childbirth: although the girl is suffering from high temperature, after a strenuous wait the due date has finally come and Ma Joad and Mrs. Wainwright²¹ are ready to help her during labor. Unfortunately what was expected to be the happiest event of the novel turns out to be the most excruciating of all as Rose gives birth to a stillborn baby. A striking aspect concerning this scene is that Steinbeck closes the most awaited for event of the novel in few lines: the scene is described very briefly, there is not a detailed description of the whole process but just the beginning of the labor and the discovery of the death. As matter of fact, the reader does not know anything about the baby until Mrs. Wainwright shows Pa Joad an apple box containing, coffin-like, the little corpse; the reader and Pa discover the truth at the same moment:

"How—is she?" Pa asked.

Ma did not look up at him again. "Awright, I think. Sleepin'."

The air was fetid and close with the smell of the birth. Uncle John clambered in and held himself upright against the side of the car. Mrs. Wainwright left her work and came to Pa. She pulled him by the elbow toward the corner of the car. She picked up a lantern and held it over an apple box in the corner. On a newspaper lay a blue shriveled little mummy.

"Never breathed," said Mrs. Wainwright softly. "Never was alive" (523).²²

²¹ She is Agnes' mother, Al's young fiancée

²² "Come stà?" chiese Pa'.

Ma' non alzò gli occhi. "Bene, mi sa. Dorme."

Il lezzo greve del parto permeava l'aria. Zio John entrò barcollando e si appoggiò alla parete del vagone. La signora Wainwright lasciò il fornello e si avvicinò a Pa. Lo prese per un gomito e lo sospinse verso un angolo del vagone. Poi afferrò un lume e lo alzò sopra una cassetta da mele poggiata nell'angolo. Su un giornale piegato giaceva la piccola mummia raggrinzita (Perroni 617).

The way in which this scene has been described by the narrator gives to it a funereal atmosphere, almost gothic I would say. A tonality that is conveyed by the use of terms like “fetid” and “smell” which sound even more disturbing considering that the following word is “birth”; these words hit the reader and leave him disconcerted not so much for the use of these specific words but rather because this adjective-word-association strikes a jarring note countering our expectations concerning the outcome of successful deliveries. Curiously enough, Steinbeck instead never uses the word ‘death’ but replaces it with unequivocal expressions like “never breathed” or “never was alive”, which shows Mrs. Wainwright’s admirable modesty and great tact in telling Pa Joad that he still has to wait to become grandpa. Further on the corpse is described as a “blue shriveled little mummy” and even though this might be probably true it is not the description we would expect of a dead baby. What is evident here is that Steinbeck wanted to portray the event in its bare reality, like he has always done in the novel, without trying to ‘embellish’ or sentimentalize a sad situation that possibly is the result of privations and malnourishment and so ultimately of society’s selfishness and indifference. What he is telling is not a romanticized version of reality but a cross-section of many Americans’ life; thus, from beginning to end, he stays true to a realist narration that does not try to make things appear under a better or worse perspective but just in the way they really are, with the consciousness that this might sometimes shock the reader. In his translation Coardi tries to soothe the ‘tension’ and renders the striking images narrated with less bleak words. No doubt that such scene would shock Italian women and, even worst, it did not certainly give a joyful image of birth, which was what the Fascist regime was proud to celebrate. Be it for personal modesty or obedience to the propaganda, Coardi renders “The air was fetid and close with the smell of the birth” with “gli odori del parto infetidivano la

“Come... sta?” domandò il babbo.

Senza guardarlo la mamma rispose: “Bene, credo. Dorme.”

Gli odori del parto infetidivano l’aria. Zio John entrò, e andò ad appoggiarsi alla parete. La signora Wainwright venne dal babbo, lo prese per il braccio e lo condusse in un angolo, e con la lanterna illuminò una cassetta da frutta posata per terra. Nella cassetta, adagiato su un giornale, stava il cadaverino. “Nato morto,” bisbigliò la signora Wainwright (Coardi 462).

stanza” and the “blue shriveled little mummy” becomes “il corpicino”; eventually he omits “Never was alive.”

It is uncle John the one entrusted to give the corpse a proper burial because being it left over in the truck’s corner it “ jus’ cause trouble an’ sorra” (527). Holding the box tight he heads toward the stream through a willow wood and after having laid the box in the water he utters his own farewell, which sounds almost as a prompting to fight even in death for values that know no death:

He said fiercely, “Go down an’ tell ‘em. Go down in the street an’ rot an’ tell ‘em that way. That’s the way you can talk. Don’ even know if you was a boy or a girl. Ain’t gonna find out. Go on down now, an’ lay in the street. Maybe they’ll know then.” He guided the box gently out into the current and let it go. It settled low in the water, edged sideways, whirled around, and turned slowly over (528).²³

Uncle John is definitely a secondary character in the novel; we do not hear his point of view very often yet he is given such an important task. His figure and especially his gesture cannot but remind us, in reverse, of the Biblical episode in which Moses was put into a basket and confided to the Nile’s stream: “And when she [a daughter of Levi] could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid *it* in the flags by the river’s brink” (King James Bible; “Exodus” 2.3). This is one of the most self-evident religious references of the novel and it also does not pass unnoticed the fact that this death is surrounded by water which creates a very contrasting image being water an universal symbol of life and regeneration. Rose gives in fact birth while outside rain is pouring down and rivers are about to overflow and eventually the corpse is offered to the river’s stream. Only at the end we will actually discover how this death has surprisingly brought not only emptiness, but life as well, but in that moment it all appears as a

²³ [...] dicendo in toni selvaggi: “Và, naviga e vendicaci! Raccontalo a tutti. Marcisci! Solo così potrai farti sentire.” Delicatamente la orientò nel senso della corrente, poi la lasciò andare. L’acqua la ghermì rapida, la fece turbinare, la rovesciò e la respinse nel mezzo del torrente (Coardi 466).

Disse con voce astiosa: “Va’ da loro e diglielo. Va’ a marcire sulla strada e diglielo così. Sarà questa la voce che avrai. Manco so se eri maschio o femmina. E non lo saprò mai. Ora va’, e marcisci sulla strada. Magari allora capiranno.” Guidò delicatamente la cassetta nella corrente poi la lasciò. La vide immergersi a metà, mettersi di sbieco, girare se stessa, e infine rovesciarsi lentamente (Perroni 623).

sad trick of fate, a grim coincidence of opposites, without counting that Rose had repeatedly feared for her baby's life and was always reassured and invited not to act paranoid. Furthermore if we retrospectively take a look at the previous happenings, there have been multiple forebodings of death. The first one to perish along the route is Joad's dog, hit by a car, then followed by grandpa and grandma Joad and Casy in the end; in a way, according to a macabre logic after the pet animal, the elderly and the middle-age man only a child was missing. Moreover Rose is the last one to find out that it has been impossible to save her baby's life:

“Ma?”

“Yeah? What you want?”

“Is—it—all right?”

Ma gave up the attempt. She kneeled down on the mattress. “You can have more,” she said. “We done ever'thing we knowed.”

Rose of Sharon struggled and pushed herself up. “Ma!”

“You couldn' he'p it” (529).²⁴

The way Ma speaks to her daughter highlights once again her typical pragmatism and her scarce inclination to any sentimentalisms; this attitude can be perceived right away by her answering “what you want?” to her daughter, just woken up and who is calling her. In the early Italian translation by Coardi its rendering with the literal equivalent “Cosa vuoi?” (467) manages to convey to the Italian reader the same sense of ‘rudeness’ emerging from the original question; as a matter of fact there is a perceptible sense of dryness and abandonment in this scene because if we think about all that Rose has been through despite her young age

²⁴ “Mamma.”

“Si? Cosa vuoi?”

“E' ... andata bene?”

La mamma rinunciò al tentativo; s'inginocchiò vicino al giaciglio. “Ne puoi avere degli altri,” disse. “Abbiamo fatto tuto quello che sapevamo.”

Rosa Tea fece uno sforzo per tirarsi su. “Mamma!”

“Non s'è potuto evitare” (Coardi 467).

“Ma' .”

“si? Che c'è?”

“E' ... è a posto?”

Ma' rinunciò al tentativo. S'inginocchiò accanto al materasso. “Puoi averne ancora,” disse. “Abbiamo fatto tutto quello che potevamo.”

Rose of Sharon si dimenò e cercò di tirarsi su. “Ma'!”

“Non ci potevi fare niente” (Perroni 624).

we would surely never want to discover our baby's death with a definitely not consolatory "You can have more" uttered by our mother. If we stick to the translation, there seems to be a problem also with the sentence "We done ever'thing we knowed". Leaving aside the ungrammatical past tenses, the use of the verb "knowed" instead of the more 'predictable' "could" causes some problems in the Italian translation as Coardi literally translates it with "abbiamo fatto tutto quello che sapevamo": this sentence is grammatically irreproachable yet it does not make much sense in Italian; that is why Perroni replaces it with a more logical "tutto quello che potevamo" (624). By the way from that scene on, the 'pregnancy topic' is never mentioned again even though it is something that has affected the whole family for a long time. Indeed in Ford's movie the stillborn baby is not even mentioned and we only see her sitting on a chair with glassy and doleful eyes and her arms touching her lap while next to her men are loading the truck, ready to leave the government camp. Rose is taken aboard and she lets herself be carried by Pa like a deadweight while Ma asks them to treat her carefully and that is all they say:

Ma: careful of her, now

Pa: she'll be all right (Ford)

The mishap has clearly already occurred but the viewer cannot imagine what has happened to her. This is surely the director's choice and just like many other issues, it is minutely narrated in the novel but it remains untouched in the movie. Obviously we do not have to forget that this is a 1940 movie and it is assumable that this kind of scene might be disturbing for the public opinion: everything considered Rose is a destitute single teen mother, abandoned by her husband and, as if all this was not enough, she delivers a stillborn baby. Yet it would be wrong to think that the family has no interest in her tragedy: they are not indifferent but they rather harbor a strong faith because of her being still so young and fertile. There is what can be defined as a Christian approach: nothing happens by chance and her denied motherhood will not be an eternal sentence; perhaps it was just not the right timing to raise a baby even

though the Joads have been able to face any obstacle on their way. But at the same time there is rage, which increases more and more because people cannot accept such a inhuman treatment that only brings destitution, unemployment, disillusionment and death. As uncle John had already remarked this baby stands as the emblem of all the young victims of a depraved society with “a million people hungry, needing the fruit - and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains” (411). In this sense the Joads restrained reaction does not stand for insensitivity or cynicism because the reality is that “There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all [our] success” (411). When sorrow piles over sorrow one can do nothing but move on and, thus, we can look at Rose instead as the ultimate expression of hope, which in the novel never disappears completely.

This never-born baby marks a watershed in Rose of Sharon’s life because it is the event that allows her inner maturation to finally start off, as it will be proved by the book’s final scene. In the movie the above mentioned scene of her carried aboard the truck is the last time we see her; then she disappears and we will not hear from her anymore. Yet both the movie and the novel seem to suggest that a better and decent life is ready to come for Rose; whereas in the novel we witness Rose’s rebirth as a socialist Mother Earth, in the movie we see her leaving the government camp and with the Joad’s wagon speeding ahead the viewer is left with the heartfelt hope that for Rose, and for the whole family as well, a brighter future is awaiting them.

Rose’s tragic experience also triggers some considerations about one of the most discussed cultural *clichés*: the American dream. The beginning of the novel seems to offer us a story we have already heard multiple times and in fact, the stereotypical elements are all there: the poor agricultural Oklahoma as station of departure, California as the final destination, the journey along Route 66 and a family in which each of its members has visualized his personal dream of a brighter future. Yet as soon as they get to California we realize that what we are dealing

with is actually the turn-around of the American dream, so much so that the more the narration proceeds the more we come to share the Joads' uncertain faith. This is what we could call the non-dream, which will reach its culmination with the death of Rose's baby, but at the same time it is incorrect to define it as the dreams' failure. What strikes us the most is precisely the fact that all this does not affect their obstinacy and inner strength, indeed they feel prompted to strive against a system that condemns them to a dehumanized life. In this sense this is an all-American novel because at the end it does not leave the reader demoralized but it rather instills the hope in possibility, in moving forward and in the awareness that unity and altruism can be extremely powerful weapons. In addition to that, the events also permitted the Joads to increase their wrath more and more: this does not mean that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a story about wrath; wrath is rather Steinbeck's answer to a society that lets babies die and a feeling that he has expressed through his characters. Moreover he also thinks that wrath is a necessary feeling in human life because it is what makes strong reactions to spark off; to him is like the fuel to fire, without which nothing can burn: "I think any young man or any man who isn't angry at one time or another is a waste of time. No, no. anger is a symbol of thought and evaluation and reaction; without it what have we got? I'm tired of non-angry people. I think anger is the healthiest thing in the world" (Shillinglaw 65).

As the title hints, wrath is in fact a core element in this novel and Steinbeck curiously associated it with grapes. Such choice is not coincidental and it is no surprise that the title as well is a Biblical reference; Carol Henning, Steinbeck's wife, suggested him with this title inspired by a verse in Julia Ward Howe's Civil War years song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", which in its turn echoed an Apocalypse's verse: "The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath" ("Apocalypse" 14:19-20). Steinbeck also asked his publishing house to include the lyrics in the text in order to avoid the irritating 'pro-communist' label in vain. Besides that, many

times the narrator or the characters themselves refer to the title's elements. Grandpa is the first one who talks about grapes, namely he dreams of grapes, and sadly he is one of the few who will never reach California. Grape is an exotic fruit, that does not grow in the Oklahoma's fields and thus, to him stands for California, for abundant food, and for well-being, in sum the concrete version of the Promised Land: "Jus' let me get out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There's a thing I ain't never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch of grapes off a bush, or whatever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin" (96). But soon grape comes to symbolize the anger of the migrant workers, who cannot find a work and have no money, no house and no food. The grape that is ripening in people is that of wrath and brings them to ask for freedom from oppression and justice. The dramatic winepress of the Dust Bowl and of depraved society has brought wrath yet it is also what has encouraged them to fight with dignity for the workers' freedom through cooperation and altruism. From a Biblical point of view it is also evident the link with red wine. Grapes is the fruit that produces wine, which in Christian tradition symbolizes God's blood, namely his sacrifice for mankind; similarly that of the Joads' as well has been a sacrifice, that they paid with suffering and even death. Their sacrifice was not only theirs but of thousands of fellow people and similarly their struggle was against the injustices of a part of mankind.

3.3 - ROSE NURTURES A STRANGER AND COMPLETES HER EVOLUTION

If we had to consider the novel according to the role and incisiveness of the female characters we may state that while Ma Joad is the undisputed protagonist of most of the novel it is Rose of Sharon the one who preponderantly emerges as the absolute pivotal figure in the final part. We are at the end of the novel, most adversities have already happened and Rose has just delivered a stillborn baby; the reader might expect that now there is nothing more to be told but actually it is right now that Steinbeck, through Rose, draws the end of this journey and closes a circle.

After several days of torrential rain and flooding the Joads leave the government camp and start by foot searching for a dry place. After having wandered through the flooded fields they spot a barn and decide to enter it and in a dark corner the Joads sight two men: the younger one tells the Joads that his father is “starvin’. Got sick in the cotton. He ain’t et for six days” (535), and begs them to help him. Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon look at each other in the eyes and, without saying a word, Rose immediately understands what to do: after having being left alone in the room she gets closer to the old man and breastfeeds him like a little baby and with this scene the novel ends.

One of the first elements to be remarked is the ‘continuity’ between Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon; the reader has had the opportunity to witness Rose’s evolution, from immature and timorous girl to grown-up woman toughened by life. It is in this moment that she proves us that she has become a new Ma Joad and Ma knows with absolute certainty that at this point she can rely on her daughter:

She looked at Rose of Sharon huddled in the comfort. Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping.
She said “Yes.”

Ma smiled. "I knowed you would. I knowed!" She looked down at her hands, tight-locked in her lap (235).²⁵

Rose is surprisingly not afraid anymore nor does she hesitate in offering herself to the dying man without asking for some time to reflect about it; by doing so Rose transforms the Joads' philosophy into action, that is, giving what you have to those who need it, as her mother previously did many times. Therefore when "Ma leaned forward and with her palm she brushed the tousled hair back from her daughter's forehead, and she kissed her on the forehead" (536) it is as if she wanted to make official Rose's entrance into adulthood. This is a kiss that seals the birth of a new woman. Shortly after:

Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. "You got to," she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. "There!" she said. "There." Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair (536).²⁶

As it has been previously underlined, this is the scene that 'closes a circle' because everything that has been told in this novel finds here a conclusion and the teachings Steinbeck wanted to convey through all the events find here their accomplishment. More precisely, the idea of universal brotherhood, through both altruism and political fight, is here brought to its most

²⁵ Poi guardò Rosa Tea aviluppata nella coperta, e aspetto d'incontrarne lo sguardo. Allora le due donne si lessero profondamente negli occhi, e Rosa Tea prese a respirare in fretta a e affannosamente. Poi disse: "Sì."

La mamma sorrise: "Ero certa!" Si guardò le mani, abbandonate in grembo (Coardi 473).

Guardò Rose of Sharon avvolta nella coltre. Gli occhi di Ma' oltrepassarono gli occhi di Rose of Sharon, poi tornarono a posarsi su di essi. E le due donne si guardarono profondamente negli occhi. La ragazza di colpo ansimò.

Disse: "Sì."

Ma' sorrise: "Lo sapevo che lo facevi. Lo sapevo!" (Perroni 632)

²⁶ Poi si alzò faticosamente in piedi aggiustandosi la coperta attorno al corpo, si diresse a passi lenti verso l'angolo e stette qualche secondo a contemplare la faccia smunta e gli occhi fissi, allucinati. Poi lentamente si sdraiò accanto a lui. L'uomo scosse lentamente la testa in segno di rifiuto. Rosa Tea sollevò un lembo della coperta e si denudò il petto. "Su, prendete," disse. Gli si fece più vicino e gli passò una mano sotto la testa e le sue dita lo carezzavano delicatamente tra i capelli. Ella si guardava attorno, e le sue labbra sorridevano, misteriosamente (Coardi 474).

Poi si alzò in piedi a fatica e si strinse la coltre intorno al corpo. Avanzò lentamente verso l'angolo e si fermò davanti all'uomo, guardando il suo volto devastato, i suoi grandi occhi spauriti. Poi lentamente gli si sdraiò accanto. L'uomo scosse lentamente la testa. "Così!" disse. "Così." La sua mano scese sulla nuca dell'uomo e la sorrise. Le sue dita gli accarezzarono dolcemente i capelli. Poi alzò lo sguardo verso il fondo del fienile, e le sue labbra si unono per un sorriso misterioso (Perroni 633).

higher and nobler level. Rose comes to the barn soaking wet, has just given birth and has nothing to eat or cover herself and yet she does not hesitate and gives her milk, namely the most intimate and precious thing she can offer in that moment; the Joads education is now complete because Rose's breastfeeding the old man is the symbol of the triumph of the 'we' over the 'I', of the individual that gives a part of itself for the sake of the other. By putting into practice Ma Joad's teaching that "worse off we get, the more we got to do" (525) Rose has completed her personal journey and has finally come to the finishing line, that is adulthood. She has come there bearing familiar tragedies and personal failures but it is through a commitment to the other that she has achieved full adulthood. In this sense there is nothing left for them to 'learn' but what they can do is only 'teaching' the others and hope that society as well can undergo a similar process.

Moreover this scene represents a rebirth and revenge from death for both characters: the old man finds nourishment and to him death seems a little farther for a moment while for Rose this gesture revenges in some way her baby's death and, by reversing every expectations, she demonstrates that sometimes death can also generate life. It is also worthwhile to remark how Rose's act is not a form of self-sacrifice: she is not to be interpreted as a woman who blinded by desperation 'throws' herself away because has nothing more to lose. Indeed she has a stronger character now and her life is finally fulfilled because her and the man's sufferings are leaving room to an indestructible alliance: "two persons become one, not through sex or even love, but through their selfless flow into a broader stream, the rising water of human endurance" (Howarth 72). Moreover this also allows Rose to imagine the joy of the birth and the fact that this man is a complete stranger does not matter to her because this is the core of the message: Rose has given life regardless of the fact that it has been generated from her body or not because what matters is that she has done something more powerful than her own self.

It is also interesting to note how this scene as well fits in the overall circular structure of the novel. We cannot but notice that the novel ends just as it began: we first see Ma Joad while preparing the meal for the family and we last see Rose while breastfeeding; in both cases the novel opens and closes with a woman preparing or offering food, that is one of the most familiar acts of altruism and love for the others. So just like Ma Joad is praised for having always acted for the benefit of the group, similarly Rose's character is fixed in a image of insuperable selflessness. By taking advantage of the reproductive faculties of her own body she is donating life not only to this specific man but to the whole Manself. For this reason this image, although destabilizing and shocking for the reader, carries a strong and hopeful message; *The Grapes of Wrath* is not a tragedy, or not only this at least, because what we are told here are stories of people who have overcome their individualism in the name of the collectivity: Ma Joad's existence is devoted to a commitment to the others, Casy has been murdered fighting for his people's rights, Tom would not hesitate to do the same. With this scene Rose "symbolically transmutes her maternal love to a love of all people" (Carpenter 568) and confirms herself therefore as the heroine of democracy, of a new democracy that encompasses the whole mankind. Of course her gesture may not be enough and perhaps the man will not live long but it is her gesture, so strongly socialist in its spontaneity, that establishes a new definition of a great family that knows no boundaries. Susan Shillinglaw also reminds us that Steinbeck, as far as this scene is concerned, used to claim that it is "no more important than any other part of the book" (147); by that the author implied that this gesture, in its being so unpredictable and disconcerting, is something that belongs to the experiences and lives of the Joad family, of all the Okies and of all the migrants: it is not an heroic gesture nor something to idolize but rather a display of kindness in the randomness of lived experiences; while if he had put this scene before in the narration it would have rendered the plot more predictable and 'ordered' which is definitely not what the novel is about.

The final lines as well are worth examining: “Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously” (536).

Rose smiles “mysteriously”, with the consciousness that something has been accomplished: she has become “the world’s true center” (Ditsky 663) and in that smile the reader can imagine Rose’s future that he is not allowed to know because of the novel’s unexpected ending; her smile seems to communicate that she has elevated herself to a state of grace that brings life and nourishment.

Of course the scene abounds in Christian references and among them there are few lines from Luke’s Gospel which seem to perfectly mirror Rose’s character:

For he [God] has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed
He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty (Luke I: 48,51,53).

Rose is now like a modern Mary and because of her mystic aura, her physical position, her blanket wrapped around her body and her mysterious smile she has often been associated to an American Nativity with a Mona Lisa smile. Here sex appears in its most pure and abstracted form as Rose uses her sexual powers, that is her bodies’ most intimate reproductive faculties, to promote Life itself (Ditsky 656).

Like Holy Mary in the Christian tradition there is nothing that Rose cannot give to others and what makes her greater is the acknowledgment of the power of other-commitment, of nursing instead of being nursed and of giving instead of taking. In this perspective we can therefore perceive a striking contrast between Rose and her father; as a matter of fact it is curious to see how on the one hand Rose proves to be so helpful even though she has nothing at all, while on the other hand “Pa and Uncle John stand helplessly gazing at the sick man” (535). Even at the

end of the novel Pa Joad seems to confirm his inability to help the family, if not through manual works. He leaves his wife the task to help and listen to the young man and to his daughter to nurture his dying father; meaningfully we see him for the last time with an helpless gaze, staring at the two men, unable to take strong decisions and by walking out of the barn he walks out of the story as well. Considering the whole novel he is the only one who has not been able to impose himself or to emerge as an evolved character: his journey through America took place only on the asphalt and not within. So while Tom is ready to die for his ideals and Al is an adult man ready for marriage and Rose is a new woman, Pa observes the passing of life with the same helplessness he had while observing the tractors demolishing his family's property.

As far as the movie is concerned, I have already noted that this last chapter has been completely omitted from Ford's work and this it was easily predictable; we do not know the actual reasons behind this choice but there is very little doubt that the 1940 censorship would not tolerate a scene that even today would be marked as scandalous.

In the end it is interesting to observe how this scene has been rendered in the Italian versions as in this last chapter as well the different renderings of the text give us material for further reflections. When Ma Joad reassures the young man she says: "Hush. Don' worry. We'll figger somepin out" (535). Coardi translated it with "Zitto. Non ti preoccupare. In qualche modo si provvede" (473), while Perroni rendered it with a "Zitto. Non ti inquietare. Ora vediamo di sistemarlo" (632). In both cases the translators have kept themselves close to the original text yet we can perceive different shades of meaning in them. First of all I personally deem Perroni's translation of "Don' worry" with "non ti inquietare" a little excessive and rather improbable. Ma would not use such a verb, which although not refined, is definitely not as colloquial as "non ti preoccupare." It is right on these details that the Italian translation should focus when it deals with a text whose language is rich in slang expressions,

neologisms and invented words that are almost impossible to render in Italian; thus, these are basically missed occasions to involve the reader in a kind of language he would be otherwise unaware of without a confrontation with the original text. Shortly after, Ma reassures the old man's son by saying: "we'll figger somepin out" and promises him to help him with his father. Perroni translated it with "ora vediamo di sistemarlo", with reference to the old man; yet his translation seems to deprive the sentence of its original meaning as the Italian verb 'sistemare' does not fully correspond to the phrasal verb "to figure out", even more so if we consider that in Italian the verb 'sistemare' does require the object. This obliges Perroni to choose an at least partially ambiguous object, namely the pronoun 'lo', which may be puzzling for an Italian reader for the identity of this 'lo' may appear not so immediate. The last remark is about the very last line: "her [*Rose's*] lips come together and smiled mysteriously" (536) has been misinterpreted by Coardi, who translates it with "e le sue labbra sorridevano, misteriosamente" (474). Firstly, by saying "le labbra sorridevano" the reader immediately imagines someone who is cheerfully smiling which is not what Rose is doing; furthermore the adverb "misteriosamente" preceded by a comma does not make any sense in this context because, if put it like that, the reason of her smile appears as something inexplicable and mysterious because without any apparent logical reason. More appropriately Perroni translated it with "e le sue labbra si unirono per un sorriso misterioso" which leaves unaltered the image of Rose that Steinbeck had in mind with her smile hinting at a fulfilled soul. It is also interesting to note how Rose's smile as well draws a cyclical movement: hers curiously is the first smile of the novel to be described - "her self-sufficient smile" (110) - and the last of the novel, "smiled mysteriously" (513). We are talking about two completely different smiles as in the time lapse between the two many things have happened and Rose is not the girl we have met at the beginning anymore; whereas during her pregnancy Rose was characterized by what could be defined as an Aeginetic smile, namely the typical proud and

contained smile of the warriors represented in the sculptures of the Greek island of Aegina, now she shows a Leonardesque smile, as indecipherable as the Mona Lisa's.

3.4 - “WE’RE THE PEOPLE”

Quite differently from the novel, John Ford’s film closes on a scene taken from chapter 28 of the book: the scene takes place immediately after the famous encounter with Tom hidden in the dark. Ma Joad once again confirms herself as a source of wisdom for the entire family and is seen dialoguing with Pa about their present life and reflecting about life in general, analyzing the way in which men and women approach life differently. Pa for the first time confesses himself as open-heartedly as he has never done before and the reader finally comes to know his thinking, his anxiety and his feeling of failure. What comes out is a disillusioned man almost unable to take decisions in a rational and independent way; yet the scene is one of the most touching and piercing of the novel.

“This here’s purtier—better lan’,” said Ma.

“I know. I never even see it, thinkin’ how the willow’s los’ its leaves now. Sometimes figgerin’ to mend that hole in the south fence. Funny! Woman takin’ over the fambly. Woman sayin’ we’ll do this here, an’ we’ll go there. An’ I don’ even care.”

“Woman can change better’n a man,” Ma said soothingly. “Woman got all her life in her arms. Man got it all in his head. Don’ you mind. Maybe—well, maybe nex’ year we can get a place.”

“We got nothin’, now,” Pa said. “Comin’ a long time—no work, no crops. What we gonna do then? How we gonna git stuff to eat? An’ I tell you Rosasharn ain’t so far from due. Git so I hate to think. Go diggin’ back to a ol’ time to keep from thinkin’. Seems like our life’s over an’ done.”

“No, it ain’t,” Ma smiled. “It ain’t, Pa. An’ that’s one more thing a woman knows. I noticed that. Man, he lives in jerks—baby born an’ a man dies, an’ that’s a jerk—gets a farm an’ loses his farm, an’ that’s a jerk. 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. We ain’t gonna die out. People is goin’ on—chargin’ a little, maybe, but goin’ right on” (499-450).

And here are Coardi’s and Perroni’s translations respectively:

“Qui è più bello” disse la mamma, “la terra è più ricca”.

“Lo so. Ma io non la guardo mai. Vedo sempre solo la nostra, adesso i salici devono aver perduto tutte le foglie; qualche volta mi ritrovo a pensare al modo migliore per tappare quel buco nella siepe. Strano, però, vedere la moglie che ha preso il posto del marito nella famiglia. La donna dice facciamo questo, andiamo là, e io non discuto neanche.”

“Siamo più adattabili che voialtri uomini,” spiego la mamma con dolcezza. “Noi la vita ce la portiamo sulle braccia, voialtri ve la portate dentro la testa. Non ti tormentare, chi sa ... Chi sa che l’anno venturo non si riesca ad avere un pezzetto di terra nostro.”

“Quando non si ha più niente come farsi illusioni? Finita la stagione dei raccolti non abbiamo più lavoro. E cosa faremo? Come faremo a mangiare? Con Rosatè, ormai vicina al suo tempo. Fa paura pensare. E’ per questo che io vivo nel passato. Sembra che non c’è più niente davanti a noi e che la nostra vita è finita.”

La mamma sorrise. “No, babbo, non è vero. Questa è un’altra cosa che le donne capiscono meglio degli uomini, me ne sono già accorta. L’uomo vive a scosse. Muore un vecchio, o nasce un bambino, son due scosse. Compra una terra, o perde la sua, son due scosse. La donna si lascia vivere, un po’ come l’acqua d’un fiume: piccole anse, piccole cascate, ma l’acqua continua a scorrere. E’ così che noi donne vediamo la vita. Nessuno di noi muore del tutto; la gente continua, con qualche cambiamento, magari, ma continua” (439-440).

“Qui è più bello ... la terra è meglio,” disse Mâ.

“Lo so. Io manco la vedo, me ne sto a pensare che a quest’ora il pioppo ha perso le foglie, o che tocca rattappare la recinzione dietro casa. Che strano! La donna si carica sulle spalle la famiglia. La donna dice dobbiamo fare questo, dobbiamo fare quello. E io manco m’arrabbio.”

“La donna può cambiare meglio dell’uomo,” disse Mâ in tono rassicurante. “La donna la vita ce l’ha tutta nelle braccia. L’uomo ce l’ha tutta nella testa. Non ti devi scoraggiare. Magari.. be’, magari l’anno prossimo abbiamo un posto tutto per noi.”

“Be’ ora non abbiamo niente,” disse Pâ. “E sta arrivano l’inverno ... niente lavoro, niente soldi. Come facciamo a cavarcela? Come facciamo a mangiare? E c’è pure Rosasharn che sta per sgravare. Roba che manco ci voglio pensare. Meglio che mi ricordo com’era prima, così non mi tocca pensare. Mi sa che la nostra vita è bell’e finita.”

“Macché finita,” disse Ma’ con un sorriso. “Non è finita per niente, Pa’. E c’è un’altra cosa che sanno le donne. Me ne sono accorta. Per l’uomo la vita è fatta a salti: se nasce tuo figlio e muore tuo padre, per l’uomo è un salto; se ti compri la terra e ti perdi la terra, per l’uomo è un salto. Per la donna invece è tutto come un fiume, che ogni tanto c’è un mulinello, ogni tanto c’è una secca, ma l’acqua continua a scorrere, va sempre dritta per la sua strada. Per la donna è così ch’è fatta la vita. La gente non muore mai fino in fondo. La gente continua come il fiume: magari cambia un po’, ma non finisce mai” (589-590).

It is night time and Ma and Pa are sitting near their car in the government camp; Pa confides Ma all his worries for their future. What we have here is a man who has lost all his energies and his dignity, as man, worker and head of the family. He does not accept with pleasure the fact that his wife had to take all these ‘roles’ on herself, therefore what keeps him alive are the memories of the past, of the time when he could rely on a few certainties at least. Ma instead, with her proverbial imperturbability, shows once again her wisdom and rational optimism in comforting her husband and uses interesting metaphors to describe the different ways in which men and women face life. Ma uses the metaphor of water, namely of a stream, by comparing the passing of life with the flowing of a stream and so once again water is a recurring element in this novel which returns with a certain regularity under various forms. Differently from her husband’s Ma’s philosophy does not let despair or mishaps affect her because she has faith in human capability of moving on and the fact that it is Ma, that is the woman, to comfort her man is not due to Ma’s sense of superiority but rather to her faith in

his capacities indeed. As far as the translation is concerned, there are few elements that are worth considering. First of all, Perroni's choice to translate "better lan'" with "la terra è meglio" is rather incomprehensible and nearly ungrammatical: a more appropriate 'migliore', or even a paraphrase, for example "la terra è più ricca" as Coardi did, would have been better, thus the sentence sounds to an Italian reader as incomplete, simply because it misses an element of comparison. Focusing on Pa's character, in the apparent inconsolable consternation that leads him only seeing in front of him the death of emotions and expectations, it is curious his noticing the willows' losing their leaves. Of course we do not know whether this is an odd coincidence or not, but in Western culture willows and poplars are often associated with the underworld as in Greek mythology they flanked the path leading to the Hades; as a matter of fact Steinbeck used the word "willow" and Coardi properly translated it with "salici", while Perroni used instead the word "pioppo". Although the latter one is not the correct rendering, these trees are often interchanged when used for their similar symbolical meaning and this would explain why Perroni opted for the poplar tree instead of any other. Further on, it is Coardi's translation which contains a misleading rendering; as a matter of fact, when Pa says Ma "Go diggin' back to a ol' time to keep from thinkin'", Coardi translates it with "Fa paura pensare. E' per questo che io vivo nel passato"; actually this is not a reflection we would credit to Pa because, despite his self acknowledged inability of taking up the reins of the family, he has never relied on the past with a melancholic attitude; what he is saying is that he does not want to think too much about the uncertain and problematic future and prefers instead to find little moments of comfort in past memories, when the family was still united and life was respectable; thus saying that he is living in the past is inaccurate since it implies a constant condition that Pa has never showed.

This dialogue appears in Ford's movie as well, but it takes place in a different context and also the way in which the two face the conversation is slightly different:

Ma: maybe. Maybe 20 days' work and maybe no days' work. We ain't got till we get it

Al: what's the matter, Ma? Getting scared?

Ma: scared, ah! I ain't never gonna be scared no more. I was tough. For a while, it looks as though we was beat. Good and beat. Looked like we didn't have nobody in the whole wide world but enemies. Like nobody was friendly no more. Made me feel kind of bad and scared too. Like we was lost and nobody cared.

Pa: You're the one that keeps us going, Ma! I ain't no good no more and I know it. Seems like I spent all my time these days thinking how it used to be. Thinking of home. I ain't never gonna see it no more.

Ma: Well, Pa, a woman can change better than a man. A man lives sort of, well, in jerks. Baby's born or somebody dies, and that's a jerk. He gets a farm or loses it, and that's a jerk. With a woman, it's all in one flow like a stream. Little eddies and waterfalls but the river, it goes right on. A woman looks at it that way.

Pa: Maybe, but we're sure taking a beaten.

Ma: I know. That's what makes us tough. Rich fellas come up and they die and their kids ain't no good, and they die out. But we keep coming. We're the people that live. They can't wipe us out, they can't lick us. We'll go on forever Pa because we're the people.

This closing scene stages Al, Ma and Pa sitting in the front seats of their wagon heading toward a non specified destination. Here the stream metaphor is followed by a strongly emphasized concept of people; as a matter of fact in this scene the most memorable sentence is definitely the closing one "We'll go on forever Pa because we're the people" which, we may say, makes up for the omission of Rose's failed birth and her encounter with the old man. Moreover this is a sentence rich in historical and religious references: first of all this inevitably reminds us of the Puritan community of the early 17th century, and of their determination to never let themselves be overwhelmed by difficulties by virtue of their being the 'elected people'. At the same time, also because of the numerous Biblical references of the novel, it is inevitable to associate Ma's sentence with the People of Israel leaving Egypt to reach the Promised Land; in both cases the reference is to people that have went through enormous challenges and sorrows but that eventually survived. Similarly Ma Joad, who has never lost her confidence, has come to the point of being scared of nothing any longer. We do not know actually if at the time of this scene Rose has already given birth to her baby or has already fed the elder man, but this is of secondary importance because what matters is the positive message of Ma's philosophy. Ma's monologue has a universal value, because it perfectly fits not only in the specific dramatic context of the Joads but in our life as well; in

the novel, instead, the attention is immediately catalyzed on Al, who confesses his desire to marry her fiancée and settle down, and the scene loses intensity.

This scene is possibly more emphatic in the movie as we find it at the end of it and leaves therefore the reader the possibility to reflect about it; moreover the scene is added further intensity by the soundtrack titled 'Red River Valley', a famous folk song (Canadian in origin), here rearranged in an accordion version and sang by actor Henry Fonda himself. The origins of this traditional song are rather dubious and still contended between Canadians and Americans and can supposedly be traced back to the late 19th century; its title may refer to the Red River of the South, a river crossing many US states and defining Texas' Northern border with Oklahoma or to the Red River Valley, on the northern border with Canada. Besides its origins, according to the folklorist Edith Fowke this melancholic song tells about the painful interrupted love relationship between a woman and her man and the notes of this song can be heard in some meaningful movie scenes. As we have just said, the song is about a separation, namely a separation from what is beloved, and as a matter of fact the song is played for instance first when Ma throws some of her personal belongings to the stove, then while the family is finally leaving Sallisaw for good heading to California and it eventually accompanies also the final scene, right after Ma has uttered her speech. Yet, if we stick to Fowke's theory, the song "was probably composed during the Red River Rebellion of 1870" and the two lovers involved were thus an "Indian or half-breed girl lamenting the departure of her white lover, a soldier who came west with Colonel Wolseley [*leader of the jointed Canadian and regular British troops, nds*] to suppress the first Red River Rebellion", in what is known today as the Canadian region of Manitoba. In this perspective, the song curiously becomes doubly meaningful as it is marked by images of dispossession, expulsion, separation and fight and resonates therefore as the ideal soundtrack to the whole narration.

CONCLUSIONS

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck is one of those texts that has been intriguing critics since its first publication in the US in 1939; the variety of themes, viewpoints, hints for further reflections and the enormous amount of references make of it a 'challenging' novel, still presents an inexhaustible source of debate. Its thematic complexity has in fact triggered numerous interpretations, ranging from the historical-economical to the religious, from the political to philosophical; the relevance of its contents has definitely reinforced the novel's fame as a 'versatile' text, as far as literary critics are concerned. In this dissertation I tried to reflect about different aspects of the novel which have been considered according to the specific perspective I have followed: the aim was that to observe Steinbeck's story from the perspective of a woman internal to Steinbeck's storyworld, be it a daughter's, a mother's, or a citizen's. This analysis has been enriched by the use of the two Italian translations, which thanks to their remarkable 'diversity', have contributed in distinctly delineating themes and individuals. This work has in fact proved how translation can be a great means of analysis to study the characters of a story, its themes and even the historical background of a given country as well as its cultural identity. The contrastive analysis that has been carried on here has allowed us to examine the two feminine characters, namely their identity, their evolution throughout the narration and the way in which Steinbeck described their being heroines of a socialism of sentiments and contextually mothers in their own way. All the excerpts, both from the original and translated versions, have been selected according to a thematic criteria in order to present these two characters in the first place, and to read through them the crucial themes of the novel itself. Surprisingly, there is no issue that does not concern them or that cannot be told by means of their actions or thinking; I tried therefore to explain and interpret their words, opinions, fears and inner turmoil by considering in my analysis, when necessary, their relationship with other characters. The idea of using feminine characters to analyze

specific themes was not coincidental but corresponds instead to the desire and curiosity of observing facts from a different viewpoint, more unusual and unpredictable, considered the time in which the novel is set. The novel is in fact a celebration of these two women, namely mother and daughter, not because of their being women but for their outstanding, contagious and inspiring courage and resolution in facing life. The delineation of the characters has been possible also through a lexical comparison between the terms used by the Italian translators and by Steinbeck, which resulted in an interesting reflection about the deepest meaning of words and their impact on the reader. One of the aims of this dissertation was in fact to highlight with practical examples the potential of translation by bringing the reader to reflect about the choice of a term instead of another and to be surprised by the ‘power’ each word can have in describing an individual or an event. At the same time I always tried to maintain a clear distinction between the objectivity of the facts and the subjectivity of personal observations, so that the reader could have a complete and not ambiguous overview. In this sense, in order to offer an analysis as objective as possible, which did not lapse in factious feminism or political radicalism, facts and critical notions have alternated with more subjective analyses, still maintaining always a direct contact with the original text and Steinbeck’s spirit. Yet, although tools and methods have been stated clearly from the very beginning, many issues have been left untouched; as a matter of fact the great number of theories, critical interpretations and readings of the novel that have mounted up along the years, sometimes also mutually contradictory, have proved that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a work that cannot be fully assessed and is thus, still unceasingly ‘evolving’ in critical terms. Having said so, I have striven for an exhaustive analysis within the boundaries of the perspective I chose, however there is here no pretension of giving an univocal interpretation or revealing indisputable truth for it would go against the essential principles of literature itself. There is thus no right or wrong here nor a self-referential attempt of listing barren notions; I would rather consider this work as a tribute to one of the most American novel of

American literature, observed (also) through the Italian perspective, both linguistic and historical-cultural. Moreover with *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck presented two women who, despite their poor Southern farmer uneducated background, are still today very modern role models, not only for women: they attempt to provoke a humanitarian change in people in silence, with no theatrical gestures or loud declarations but with meaningful little actions in everyday life. Their revolution starts from the inside and heads toward the outside; it starts from the single individual and aims at the whole collectivity.

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