

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Commentary by Gaby 8C

What does the truck driver notice about Tom when he sits beside him in the truck, which makes him suspicious?

The truck driver notices Tom's shiny hands. If you use a pickaxe or a sledge after a while, your hands get hard and rough and shiny. He was also suspicious because he wondered what kind of work Tom could find in that area, that made him use a pick or sledge. You would think that someone that lived in Oklahoma would be picking crops and taking care of their land, instead of swinging a sledge. He explains that he usually notices small things like that all the time. We also see that the driver notices Tom's shoes, which are new, stiff, and bulky prison shoes.

Who does Tom encounter after getting out of the truck?

Tom encounters Preacher Casey after he gets out of the truck. They talk and remember how Casey baptised Tom, and how he used to love to preach. How he'd "get an irrigation ditch so squirming full of repented sinners he pretty near drowned half of 'em! He says that now he lost the spirit. He explains that he has nothing to preach about anymore and that he isn't so sure of things anymore. He says that he lost the call. He tells Tom about what he used to preach about and how now he sees everything in a new perspective, like he has new eyes. Then Casey decides to go with Tom to his parent's house so he can eat something good.

Why did Tom only get 4 years jail?

Tom was put in jail because he killed a man. They were at a dance and they were both drunk, the guy held a knife at him and he hit him with a shovel. He only got 4 years because he killed him for self-defence. If he hadn't killed the man, then he would have been the one killed.

Why does Casey say he 'lost the spirit'?

He doesn't know what to preach about. He doesn't know what to believe anymore. He doesn't know the answers to all the questions everyone keeps asking him. He doesn't know what the Holy Spirit is anymore. He used to think it was love, but now everything has changed. What is sin, he asks himself? He asks himself all these questions that he only started asking himself when the great depression started.

Why are Tom's eyes 'bewildered' when going through the family's old cabin?

Tom is all excited to see his parents after more than four years, and then he sees his house deserted. He is amazed at how nothing is there except for a few of their possessions. He has no idea where they could be! All of these questions are running through his head, and he is imagining the worst possible situations. He wonders if they're dead, if they left without him, if they moved. He doesn't know what to think because he has no idea what could have happened. His family loved that house and that land so he has no idea why they aren't there.

What items belonging to his family does he pick up off the floor?

Tom finds two objects on the ground: His mom's favourite pair of shoes, and a hat that Tom himself gave his grandfather when he left. When he finds these things he gets even more confused. Why would they leave these behind? Why are these only two possessions they left here? What happened to them?

Who is hiding in the cabin and what does he tell Tom and Casey?

They find Muley in the cabin, hiding. He explains what happened to Tom's family and many others: the government took their lands. He talks about the 'cats', that came and destroyed their land, and he talks about how everyone is leaving for California, to find a better place; everyone except for him. How all of the flyers passed out in Oklahoma influenced most of the citizens. They were all

trying to go find a better place to live. They all wanted the same: money to feed their children, and a roof over their head, and California provided all of that. When he describes this we see the pain that he expresses for the loss of his land, and he shows us how much he loved it.

Ford's use of flashback gives us more insight. How do the scenes contrast with what Tom sees?

Tom sees a man filled with pain and slightly crazy. His land has been taken away from him and we see what difference it made to Muley. The flash backs explain, what happened to Tom's family and the rest of the citizens. We see that Muley is lonely and desperate for a place to stay. We see that he has been alone and sleeping in wherever he can for a while. We see Tom's reaction to what Muley says and we see understanding and confusion at the same time. Muley can explain the situation in a very detailed way, but Tom is always going to be confused about the situation.

Why is Muley surprised when the tractor driver takes off his goggles?

The driver who drives the 'cats' is one of Muley's own people: a neighbour probably, a fellow farmer who has worked hard in the crops. He doesn't understand why anyone would betray their own people. He knows how much he cares for the land and he just doesn't understand why somebody wouldn't love it the same way he does. He would never do that to the people of the land, no matter how much money they pay him, and is amazed that some one else can. He is hurt, and scandalized.

What do Tom and Casey find when they arrive at Uncle John's cabin?

Describe the first meeting between Tom and Ma.

When Tom and Ma first see each other, there isn't much emotion in their actions: they don't hug, they shake hands, and they're a little awkward around each other, as if they don't know what to say, and then the whole façade of being gone 4 years falls down and Ma goes back to being a preoccupied mother to her son.

What is the general response to Tom's homecoming?

Everyone is very excited when Tom comes back, which shows how tightly knit the family is. They hug and smile, and Tom greets all of them. Most of them think that he bust out of jail, they don't believe he's on parole. But generally, they're very happy to see him.

Inside the cabin, Ma prepares to lave her home. How does John Ford capture the mood without words?

While everyone is outside preparing for the upcoming trip, Ma is inside, packing her things. The moment we see her, a song begins to play: Red River Valley. Her eyes are full of sorrow as she prepares to leave. And in fact, as John Ford once said, it's her eyes which convey the mood; the sad, desolate mood.

Why does Grandpa refuse to go with them?

Grandpa has the same ideas that Muley has: to stay at his house. He says: "This is my country and I belong here", and he, similar to Muley, holds the dirt in his hand, "My dirt" he says. He has an attachment to the land, and doesn't want to let go.

As the truck moves along the highway, the scene dissolves into a montage. What are some of the images which are superimposed?

This scene dissolves into a montage: almost filling the screen we see the sign of Highway 66. Superimposed is a montage of jalopies, all going to California, piled with everything the families have ever had. It indicates that the departure of the Joad family isn't only of them, but it's a mass movement throughout America.