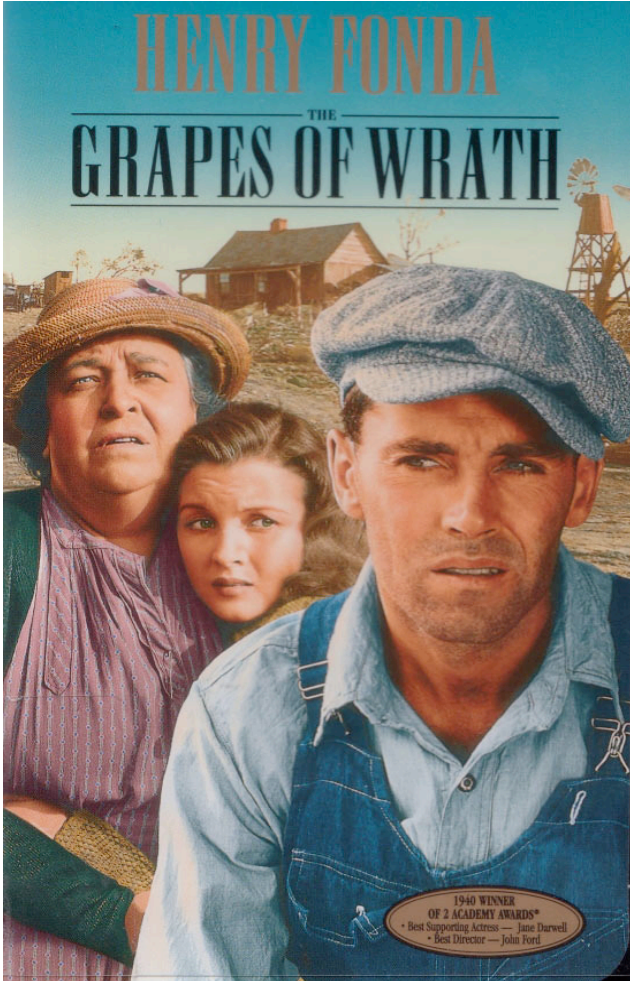


‘The Grapes of Wrath’ John Ford
Commentary by Roberto 8T



Describe the opening shot

The opening shot is set during the daytime on the Oklahoma Paved Highway. For the first time in the movie we see the main character, Tom Joad, who is waiting on the side of the highway for someone to stop for him. He wears brand new clothes and comes down the road from the left side of the highway. During this first scene the attention of the camera drifts to a diner restaurant situated on the side of the road. We can also hear a typical 1930's song being played, which transmits the mood of the times. When Tom Joad reaches the restaurant he notices a truck that was parked with the words, "OKLAHOMA CITY TRANSPORT COMPANY" and curiously asks the driver if he can drive him for a short while and drop him off. The driver is depicted as a very big and tall man who looks rather hard, chewing a toothpick who, when he sees Tom Joad tells him in a straight-forward tone that the truck is not for riders. After conversing for a couple of minutes, the driver with hesitation finally decides to let Tom on.

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

When Tom enters the truck he sits down next to driver who looks at him suspiciously and at the same time with curiosity. However, Joad seems not to notice the driver's curiosity and continues looking straight ahead without giving him much attention. The driver becomes particularly suspicious when he glances at Tom's shoes. He notices, even if for a minute, that they are prison shoes which looked new and stiff. The bus driver tries cunningly to find out about Tom by adopting another argument. He starts commenting on his hands. However, Tom understands the driver's intentions and immediately is annoyed by this. He tells the driver he hasn't given him a break since he has entered the truck and astutely asks him to get right to what he really wanted to say because he had understood him. From the discussion between Tom and the truck driver I learned that Tom had been in the penitentiary for 4 years.



Who does Tom encounter after getting out of the truck?

After getting out of the truck the scene changes to a willow tree which is lit by daylight. We are introduced to a new character here: Casy, a tall, lanky man who is leaning back against a tree fixing one of his shoes. While looking at Tom, Casy recognizes him and introduces himself as the preacher who baptized him. At that point they get into a conversation, where Casy attempts to explain to Tom why he didn't preach anymore and that he had "lost the spirit".



Why did Tom only get 7 years jail?

Tom only got 7 years (but actually served 4) of jail because he was injured by the man he killed in self-defence. He describes the moment when the man caught a knife in him and in reacting Tom hit him with a shovel, killing him.



Why does Casy say he lost the spirit?

As we all know, Casy used to be a preacher. A preacher must be able to correctly advocate or inculcate a religious teaching. Of course, in most cases, preachers claim to be illuminated or guided by God or in Casy's case, "The holy spirit". Casy, has no longer preached in many years, so when he says, "I lost the spirit", he means that he has lost his way and is no longer guided by the "spirit" to spread a religious meaning to people.

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

Tom is bewildered when he enters the old Cabin because he is totally surprised that he can see none of his relatives, his father and his mother. He wonders what has happened to them, if they're dead or have disappeared. Tom's attitude also derives from the dark and gloomy atmosphere transmitted by the cabin which for months has been uninhabited. There is nothing in the house but the sound of wind and dust blowing on the walls of the cabin which creates an empty, ghostlike atmosphere.



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

While walking through the cabin Tom picks up various items belonging to his family: a broken woman's high button shoe belonging to his mother and a battered felt hat which he had previously owned and had given to his grandfather when they had taken him away to jail. Besides these two significant objects Tom also observes broken candles and some miserable discarded things scattered around on the floor.



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

The director shifts the attention of the scene from Tom to a door near the cabin's back room where a little man named Muley rested motionless. Muley explains to Tom and Casy where the rest of the family had gone. He says that a couple of weeks before, everyone had left for Uncle John's cabin but couldn't remain there either because he had to get off the land as well. Everyone, including the Joads had to leave the land where they had always lived in order to leave space for new buildings and constructions. Muley tells Tom that everyone's goal was to go to California, which in those year's represented a "Garden of Eden" for all of the American people.

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

When Casy and John arrive at Uncle John's Cabin they discover that the family is still there and they haven't yet departed for California.

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

Muley is surprised because while looking at the tractor driver he recognizes him as the son of Joe Davis. They were country people and Muley tells him why he was doing these things against his own people.

Describe the first meeting between Tom and Ma.

As soon as Tom's mother sees her son again after a long time she immediately worries if he had 'busted out' and if he had been forced to hide. She is overwhelmed



with joy and happiness and thanks God that she has finally seen her son again. Ma is extremely happy we cannot imagine what a great gift it has been for her to leave for California in her son's company and not alone as she thought she would be. The conversation between Ma and Tom continues for a short time and focuses mostly on questions being asked reciprocally by the two characters.

What is the family's general response to Tom's homecoming?

I would say that the entire family is happy to see Tom once again and instinctively think something wrong has happened - has he 'busted out of jail'? They are all amazed and at the same time pleased by Tom's unexpected arrival.

Why does Grandpa refuse to go with them?

Grandpa absolutely doesn't want to go with them because he says that it has always been his land, the place where he belongs, where he was born, where he lived and where he will die. While talking he picks up a small amount of earth and with his hands starts plying with it - repeating his words over and over again convincing all about his courageous, yet unrealistic, decision to remain on his land.



photo courtesy of the Woody Guthrie Archive

Woody Guthrie wrote a song, “Tom Joad” in which he describes the happenings of the story very well and accurately.