

## THE CONCEPT OF "MOTHER" IN JOHN ERNEST STEINBECK'S WORKS

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**Abstract.** *This article explores the symbolic and social meaning of the concept of "mother" in the works of John Ernest Steinbeck. In works such as The Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden, images of motherhood are analyzed as symbols of family stability and human endurance. The article highlights the social significance of motherhood in Steinbeck's work and its role in revealing human nature.*

**Keywords:** *John Ernest Steinbeck, concept of mother, Ma Joad, motherhood, The Grapes of Wrath, East of Eden, social significance, symbolism, family stability, human endurance.*

## КОНЦЕПТ «МАТЕРИ» В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ ДЖОНА ЭРНЕСТА СТЕЙНБЕКА

**Аннотация.** *В статье исследуется символическое и социальное значение концепта «мать» в произведениях Джона Эрнеста Стейнбека. В таких произведениях, как «Гроздь гнева» и «К востоку от рая», образы материнства анализируются как символы стабильности семьи и человеческой выносливости. В статье подчеркивается социальная значимость материнства в творчестве Стейнбека и его роль в раскрытии человеческой натуры.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Джон Эрнест Стейнбек, концепция матери, Ма Джоад, материнство, «Гроздь гнева», «К востоку от рая», социальная значимость, символизм, стабильность семьи, человеческая выносливость.*

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**Introduction:** John Ernest Steinbeck, one of the greatest representatives of 20th-century literature, employed a unique style in his works to explore the deep layers of human nature and address social and economic issues in society.

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His works are dedicated to depicting the most painful periods of American society, particularly focusing on social inequality, poverty, and family crises during the years of the Great Depression. In Steinbeck's works, the role of the family and the mother figure is one of the central themes, with a particular emphasis on their societal significance.

John Ernest Steinbeck, a prominent 20th-century American writer, often explored deep human emotions and the complexities of social and economic issues in his works. His portrayal of characters, particularly mothers, reflects his interest in human endurance, societal structures, and family dynamics. The concept of "mother" in Steinbeck's literature is far from just a biological role; it symbolizes human strength, resilience, and the moral foundation of society.

In Steinbeck's novels, "mother" is depicted not only as a nurturing figure but also as an emblem of societal responsibility. Through the characters of Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Cathy Trask in *East of Eden*, Steinbeck examines contrasting representations of motherhood.

Ma Joad is portrayed as the unifying force within the family, a symbol of endurance and social responsibility. She holds the family together through the harshest conditions and embodies the collective struggle for justice and survival. On the other hand, Cathy Trask represents an unconventional, more selfish interpretation of motherhood, highlighting the darker side of human nature and the personal conflicts that arise when motherhood is overshadowed by individual desires.

Steinbeck's treatment of motherhood challenges traditional perceptions. While Ma Joad stands as a symbol of social unity and moral strength, Cathy Trask showcases a maternal figure driven by egoism and a desire for control. These characters present distinct views on motherhood that reflect the complexities and contradictions within human nature.

Through his nuanced portrayal of motherhood, Steinbeck touches on the universal themes of human suffering, resilience, and the role of women in shaping societal values. The representation of mothers in his works often serves as a reflection of broader social issues, including poverty, inequality, and the struggle for justice. The concept of "mother" in Steinbeck's novels is not only a familial role but also an essential element in understanding the human condition and the moral fabric of society.

Ultimately, the concept of "mother" in Steinbeck's works is a powerful symbol that goes beyond the traditional maternal role. It speaks to the social and psychological dimensions of human relationships and the strength that lies within individuals to navigate the complexities of life.

Whether as a figure of hope, endurance, or selfishness, Steinbeck's mothers are pivotal in driving the narrative and addressing the larger themes of survival, family, and social responsibility.

The concept of "mother" in Steinbeck's works is not only depicted in a biological or traditional sense but also as a symbol of humanity's social and spiritual foundation. Particularly through the characters of Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Cathy Trask in *East of Eden*, the author reflects various perspectives on motherhood. Ma Joad represents the unifying force of the family and an embodiment of endurance, while Cathy Trask is depicted as an unconventional mother who prioritizes her own interests. Through these approaches, Steinbeck discusses the societal stereotypes surrounding motherhood and reveals the complex aspects of humanity. This article is dedicated to studying the symbolic meaning of the concept of "mother" and its unique representation in Steinbeck's works. It analyzes the social and spiritual significance of motherhood, as well as its broad representation in his works. This research helps deepen the understanding of human values reflected in the writer's works.

**Literature Review and Methodology:** The concept of "mother" holds significant importance in John Ernest Steinbeck's works, and many scholarly investigations have been carried out on this theme. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad's character is portrayed as the unifying force of the family. Studies show that Ma Joad is not just a mother fulfilling her duties but also the emotional and spiritual anchor of the family members. Benson (1984) describes this character as a symbol of human solidarity.

In *East of Eden*, Cathy Trask's character presents a contrasting approach to the concept of motherhood. Scholars (Lisca, 1978; Shillinglaw, 2014) emphasize that through Cathy's character, Steinbeck provides a critical perspective on traditional stereotypes about motherhood and womanhood. This character is used to portray the crisis arising from a person's prioritization of self-interest.

Much of the literature focuses on Steinbeck's depiction of motherhood as a symbol of social responsibility and psychological endurance. Shillinglaw (2014) notes that the author sought to highlight social issues through the portrayal of his characters. These studies reveal that Steinbeck's works view motherhood not only as a family concept but also as having social and symbolic significance.

**Methodology:** Thematic analysis: The theme of motherhood was deeply analyzed in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*. In each work, the symbolic and social aspects of motherhood were identified (Steinbeck, 1952) [5].

Comparative approach: The characters of Ma Joad and Cathy Trask were compared, analyzing the positive and negative aspects of motherhood, as well as the influence of societal stereotypes (Benson, 1984) [1].

**Contextual analysis:** The social issues and period-specific interpretations of motherhood in Steinbeck's works were explored. The writer's ideas and perspectives were examined based on the American social environment during the time the works were written (Lisca, 1978).

Through these methodological approaches, the complexity and multifaceted meaning of the concept of motherhood in Steinbeck's works were revealed. This not only shows motherhood in biological terms but also as a social and spiritual phenomenon.

**Results and Discussion:** Symbol of social stability: In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad's character exemplifies the role of motherhood in fulfilling social responsibility. She plays a crucial role in helping the family endure economic hardships and social pressures. Benson (1984) considers Ma Joad a "bright symbol of human solidarity and social justice." This character, through her emotional resilience, becomes a symbol of hope for other families.

Complex aspects of motherhood: In *East of Eden*, through the character of Cathy Trask, the negative aspects of motherhood are depicted. Cathy is portrayed not only as harmful to her children but also to society. Lisca (1978) argues that this character is used to explore human flaws and aspects of motherhood that deviate from traditional stereotypes. Through Cathy, Steinbeck critically addresses the notion of motherhood as an inherently positive concept [2].

Psychological endurance and leadership: Ma Joad's heroism manifests in her leadership within her family and society. Shillinglaw (2014) views this character as an expression of the human ability to find strength even in the most difficult circumstances.

Motherhood and human rights protection: Steinbeck's works present motherhood in a broad context, not limited to the family but intricately tied to social issues. In Ma Joad's character, for example, she plays a pivotal role in advocating for social justice, organizing collective action, and supporting the oppressed (Steinbeck, 1939) [4].

Social and historical context of motherhood: Steinbeck's works, written during the economic depression in America, view the concept of motherhood not only as a family institution but also as a social and historical phenomenon. The research findings show that the writer interprets motherhood as a central element in social change (Benson, 1984).

Stereotypical and unconventional interpretations of motherhood: In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad represents the stereotypical positive aspects of motherhood, while in *East of Eden*, Cathy

Trask represents an unconventional and negative view of motherhood. Despite being contrasting characters, they highlight Steinbeck's intention to depict motherhood as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Lisca, 1978).

Social significance of motherhood: Through Ma Joad's character, Steinbeck portrays women as the moral foundation of society. As Shillinglaw (2014) emphasizes, Steinbeck's works remind readers of the responsibility of individuals toward others.

**Conclusion:** In John Ernest Steinbeck's works, the concept of "mother" is portrayed in a multifaceted and complex manner. He explores motherhood not only from a biological but also from a social, psychological, and philosophical perspective. The mothers in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* play various social and moral roles, being essential in maintaining the moral foundation and stability of society. Ma Joad's character supports social solidarity and stability, while Cathy Trask's character reveals the negative aspects of motherhood, such as egoism and the prioritization of personal gain. Steinbeck examines motherhood in a social context, highlighting its role in understanding responsibility in humanity and society. His works present a deep social and philosophical analysis of the various roles women play in society. This analysis reflects Steinbeck's complex and multifaceted approach to the concept of "mother." The writer demonstrates his interest in exploring both the positive and negative aspects of motherhood, creating new interpretations of the concept in his literary legacy.

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