

# AMERICAN DREAM IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* AND JEFFREY ARCHER'S *KANE AND ABEL*

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article attempts to analyze the American Dream in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath and Jeffry Archer's Kane and Abel. The article uses American Dream Concepts and Historical background to analyze the characters. The study aims at comparing two different literary works coming from two different cultures, nationalities, and historical background. The article studies the concepts of the American Dream which holds three key points, better, richer, and fuller life with opportunity according to ability or achievement. The results of this article can be formulated as follows: 1) Both have the American Dream and different achievements and effort to gain the American Dream through the representation of the characters of Ma Joad in The Grapes of Wrath whose American Dream is unattainable and Abel in the Kane and Abel whose American Dream is attainable. (2) Both Ma Joad and Abel struggle to concretize the American Dream while Ma Joad cannot achieve the American Dream through her hard effort. Abel achieves the American Dream. Therefore, Ma Joad's mobility is downward, while Abel's is upward. (3) The similarities of the two novels are the descriptions of the main characters that are poor people to achieve and struggle for the American Dream.*

**Keywords:** *American Dream Concepts, Comparative Literature, Historical Background.*

## BACKGROUND

Susan Bassnett defines that Comparative Literature involves the study of text across cultures, interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literature and other studies across both time and space (1993:1). according to Henry Remak in Susan Bassnett, American School of Comparative literature is to find out what lies beyond the similarities and dissimilarities (social condition, economic condition, political conditions, cultures, architectures, beliefs, religions, and so on), and thus, the things beyond the similarities and dissimilarities of the literary works are not limited to literature only but can go to other discipline (1993:31). Comparative Literature can be applied in the American Dream that is reflected in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* because they have similarities and differences in the American Dream.

Adams defines that the American Dream is a dream of a land in which life should be better, richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity according to ability or achievement (1931:418). The American Dream is a dream of better life as comfortable life, richer life as wealth possession, fuller life as self-actualization with opportunity according to ability and achievement.

John Steinbeck was an American novelist whose books, including his landmark work, *The Grapes of Wrath*, often dealt with social and economic issues. Steinbeck's novels can be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor (Bloom, 2005:8). He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1940 and a National Book Award (Bloom, 2005:12). *The Grapes of Wrath* describes the idea of unattainable American Dream. Certainly, he writes about the struggle that is in America of the 1930s (Bloom, 2005:12). The article writer chooses Ma Joad as the object of the study. Ma is the backbone of the Joad family: strong-minded and resolute.

Jeffrey Archer is a British member of parliament who is also an international bestseller writer. ([www.famousauthors.org/jeffrey-archer](http://www.famousauthors.org/jeffrey-archer)). Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* tells that Abel is an immigrant from Eastern Europe who clawed his way into the attainable American Dream (Archer, 1979:556).

This article writer will analyze how the American Dream concepts are described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*, how the struggles of the main characters in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* to get the American

Dream and the similarities and differences of the American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*. The two novels have same themes that it is the American Dream. The articlewriter will apply American School of Comparative Literature, American Dream concepts, and historical background

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research in purpose to analyze how the American Dream is described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*, and how the struggle of the main characters in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* to get the American Dream and the similarities and differences of the American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* is a library research.

The main data is taken from novels John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* published in 1946 and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* published in 1981. The supporting data is taken from articles, journal of literature, e-book, and other related sources which have relationships with the main data. The collecting data technique includes intensive close reading, note taking, classifying the data, interpreting, and discussing the data. After the novels been analyzed, then the data will be displayed into the tables which been discussed previously, the next chapter contains of discussion will discuss the findings have been founded by using data source and expert triangulation.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **1. American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*.**

#### **A. American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath***

##### **1. Life**

###### **1.1 Better life**

Ma Joad has loan to the bank because the Dust Bowl destroys her land. Her suffering can be seen in this following quotation:

“Her face hardened and her eyes grew cold.” I never had my house pushed over,”she said.” I never had my fambly stuck out on the

road. I never had to sell- ever ' thing- here they come now”  
(Steinbeck, 1946:94).

From the historical background, the article writer knows that at the time California was a prosperous area where it became a destination for many people around America suffering the Dust Bowl to go there. In the novel, the Dust Bowl causes peasants to fail to harvest their crops.

The following quotation shows how Ma Joad expresses her opinion about her vision that their efforts in California are to gain a better life.

Yes, that's a good way. 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. They ain't gonna be able to stand it, they'll get to yellin' so (Steinbeck, 1946:113).

To have a little white house is a visualization of how a better life can be achieved in the mind of Ma Joad. However, in California, Ma Joad cannot achieve the better life that is described by owning the little house.

## **1.2 Richer Life**

Ma Joad moves from a place to other places in California to gain a better and richer life. Better life is closely related to richer life. When someone has a richer life, it means he has a better life. To have much money is an indication of being rich. Being rich is the standard of a better life. The following quotation shows the previous statements:

“Winter's on the way. I jus' hope we can get some money 'fore it comes. Tent ain't gonna be nice in the winter.” Ma sighed, and then she straightened her head. “Tom,” she said, “wegotta have a house in the winter” (Steinbeck, 1946:453).

The upcoming winter will make the family live in a horrible situation, jobless, and no money.

### 1.3 Fuller Life

Ma Joad wants to gain fuller life that her family can work in California where is yellow paper telling how they need folks to work. She decides to leave Oklahoma to get the fuller life:

She said. "Your father got a han'bill on yella paper, tellin' how they need folks to work. They wouldn't go to that trouble if they wasn't plenty work. Costs'em good money to get them han'billout. What'd they want ta lie for, an' costin' em money to lie'?" (Steinbeck,1946:113).

Ma Joad cannot gain the fuller life in Weedpatch Camp.

## 2. Opportunity

Ma joad cannot achieve the opportunity because she is an Okie and harsh condition. Ma Joad as okies are pejorative adressing names that are described in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath through Ma Joad, that has dirty, ignorant, degenerate, sexual maniac qualities and become thieves (Steinbeck, 1946:354).

### 2.1 Ability

Ma Joad's ability to pick peaches twenty boxes in the Hooper Ranch all day only get one dollar for supper.

### 2.2 Achievement

In Hooper Ranch, Ma's family gets job but the wages is low so they are still poor.

## B. American Dream in Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*.

### 1. Life

#### 1.1. Better life

Abel decides to go to America for achieving the better life. His decision can be seen in this quotation:

Wladek began to face the fact that he could never turn to a land peopled by such ghosts, until he had made something worthwhile of his life. With that single thought in mind he set his heart on going to America, as his countryman Tadeusz Kosciuszko of whom the Baron had told so many enthralling tales, had done so long before him. The

United States, described by Pawel Zaleski as the 'New World'. The very name inspired Wladek with a hope for the future and a chance to return to Poland in triumph (Archer, 1981:178).

Abel decides to achieve the American Dream in America as new world for him.

### **1.2. Richer Life**

Because of New York Stock market was trouble, Davis Leroy commits suicide by jumping out window because Cane and Cabot bank takes possession of the freeholds (Archer, 1981:270). Therefore, Abel becomes the Richmond hotel owner (Archer, 1981:299).

### **1.3 Fuller Life**

Abel searches job from Brooklyn to Queens. Then he finds work in a butcher's shop which paid nine dollars for a six and a half day week, and allows him to sleep above the premises (Archer, 1981: 206). Next, Abel get better job at Plaza. In the morning he works and in the evening, he enrolls for night course in English at Columbia University (Archer, 1981: 206).

## **2. Opportunity**

Abel has opportunity to escape from a Russian labor camp and was lucky enough to reach America. His opportunity lives in America is country in the world where he can arrive with nothing and become a millionaire through damned hard work regardless of his background (Archer, 1981:391).

### **2.1. Ability**

Abel searches job from Brooklyn to Queens. Then he can work in a butcher's shop which paid nine dollars for a six and a half day week, and allows him to sleep above the premises (Archer, 1981: 206). Next, Abel get better job at Plaza. In the morning he works and in the evening, he enrolls for night course in English at Columbia University (Archer, 1981: 206)

### **2.2. Achievement**

Abel achieves richer life by owning the Richmond hotel. Abel achieves richer life that it is proved by his donation to the Polish Democrats in

Chicago. The Baron achieves profit over the decade. Therefore Abel has paid back all the loans(Archer, 1981:384).

### **C. Comparison of American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel***

#### **1. Similarities**

The two characters that are studied, Ma Joad and Abel that are described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* are also parts of the people that try to gain the American Dream. Both Ma Joad and Abel try to find the better, richer, and fuller life for everyone, with opportunity according to ability or achievement.

Even though the two characters, Ma Joad and Abel come different from culture, times, and social background but both of the really have intention to gain the points of the American Dream. They face the problems that can be obstacles to achieve the dream, but they try to make the dream come true in the future. Ma Joad has a dream about the better, richer, and fuller life that can take place in an American area, California, so does Abel who has a dream about the better life also in a place in American area, in this case New York.

From the historical background, both are influenced by the horror of malaise in 1930's. Malaise gives effects to many people around the world, both rich and poor people. Ma Joad has to face a condition of the banks' taking over on her land where is worsened with the coming of the Dust Bowl; while Abel faces the Malaise when he is in Boston and faces the hardship during the event.

#### **3. Differences**

Yet the two characters try to make the American dream come true, but they face different problems and how they behave against the challenges that they have to overcome. To respond the difficulties of Malaise to make the American dream come true, Ma Joad cannot beat the powerful institution like banks which take her land from her possession. The process of the bank's acquisition over her land is the start of her hard efforts to bear on the dream which becomes a catastrophe for the family. Abel, on the other hand is one that can take advantage from the malaise. He can have hotels after the boss leaves them because of desperation, and finally the boss commits

suicide. From the historical background, Malaise causes some people commit suicide because they cannot stand with the condition.

## **2. The struggles of the main characters in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffry Archer's *Kane and Abel* in their efforts to get the American Dream**

### **Comparison of Struggles in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel***

#### **1) Similarities**

Historically people travel from Europe to fight against the hardship that may challenge the dreamers of the new land. From generations to generations, the hard struggles occur among the fighters of the American Dream. One of the descendants of the early Americans that try to gain the American Dream is Ma Joad and her family.

Both Ma Joad and Abel struggle to hard to make the American Dream by facing the Great Depression that gives impact on Ma Joad by banks' taking over the land of the farmers in which Ma Joad is one of the farmers. By the bank's action Ma joad must leave her land and experience displacement. The process of displacement forces her to dream about the dream land. The struggle of fighting the Great Depression is also experienced by Abel. Abel has to struggle to face the difficulties during the Great Depression. He struggles to find the dream land after being disposed when he lives in Poland like Ma Joad who experiences dispossession.

#### **2) Differences**

Both Ma Joad and Abel struggle hard to make the American Dream comes true, but they have different experiences to bear the dream on. While Ma Joad struggles to make the American Dream come true by selling all of her belongings in the her hometowns, Oklahoma, and go to the dream land, California without gaining successfulness, Abel starts his struggles by leaving his hometown in Slonim, Poland, working in the U.S's embassy in Constantinople, and go to the dream land, NewYork. From the different destinations of Ma Joad and Abel, the article writer can conclude that Ma Joad

chooses a farming area, while Abel prefers an urban area. The different destinations are related to their intention that what they are going to do when they arrive. Ma Joad is a farmer, so that she wants to bring her dream of the American Dream into reality by becoming a peach picker, while Abel, realizing that he arrives in a big city, he struggles to bring his American dream into reality by achieving a bachelor degree and learning English while working.

Ma Joad's obstacles to achieve the American dream are due to the response of the Californians who do not expect her arrival there. When Ma Joad as an Okie makes contacts for the first time with the people where the destination of the imaginative dream is fought for, she faces an antagonistic way from the people. On the other hand, Abel does not face an antagonistic way from the American People

### **3) The similarities and differences of the American dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*.**

#### **3.1 Similarities**

Both characters that are studied, Ma Joad and Abel have similarities in their ideas on the American Dream. Both of them come from poor people. Because of the poverty that they suffer, both characters that are studied want to have a better life. Both of the characters want to make the dream come true by living and struggling in the United States. Living in America means that both Ma Joad and Abel have a dream about the success life in the dream land.

The great desire of achieving the American Dream is both of the novels owned by the following generations from the previous generations like Ma Joad as well as the first generation that migrates to America like Abel. Ma Joad in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* works in her land to achieve the American Dream that is described in California.

To achieve the American Dream as they expect does not mean that they will get the dream come true easily. The hardship to achieve the dream for both characters is in the form of the terrible Great Depression in 1930's. The Great Depression strikes both characters fiercely. The Great Depression

makes both of them become resent less after banks plan to take over the places they work. Ma Joad experiences displacement, while Abel faces uncertainty about his future after his boss, Leroy commits suicide.

### **3.2. Differences**

Okies have lived in America from generations after generations. From their ancestors they have inherited the land that they work in, so that their ancestors have made the dream easier to gain, but it is ruined when the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl come. Okies struggle to achieve the American Dream from their ancestors.

Okies are pejorative addressing names that are described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* quality through Ma Joad, that has dirty, ignorant, degenerate, sexual maniac qualities and become thieves (Steinbeck, 1946:354). As an Okie, Ma Joad does not have opportunity to get the American Dream in California because Californian people think that Okies will cause problems in there. The Californian people think that Okies will cause problem in California.

Ma Joad is an American. Her ancestors live there from previous generations, while Abel is a first immigrant generation. The different background results a condition that is typically different. Ma Joad tries to concretize the American dream by continuing the dream that is started by previous generation. From the story, it can be discussed that Ma Joad's family has already had a land and the family can start their farming activities well. They have their own land. Everything is ruined with the Great Depression and it is worsened with the coming of the Dust Bowl. On the other hand, Abel is a first generation of immigrant coming from Europe, Poland. By becoming the first generation of immigrant, Abel starts every fortune he fights for the dream from zero. He does not inherit a land and own a piece of land in America. It is completely different compared to Ma Joad. She does not start her struggle to make the dream come true from zero because she has already had a piece of land.

The other different aspect that can be studied is that Ma Joad tries to concretize the dream by moving to an American land, California. The choice is rationally done for a farmer family because California is a good place in the history of the American farming in normal time; moreover Ma Joad faces

the Dust Bowl in which California does not suffer from the terrible natural disaster. Therefore, it can be understood that Ma Joad and her family move to California to get the American dream. On the other hand, Abel tries to concretize the dream by moving to an American land, Boston, Massachusetts. Boston is a big city that opens a great opportunity for many people to find jobs. At the beginning he works as a butcher, and then he works as an employee in a hotel. While working, he also learns English, so that this skill helps him to gain his dream.

The different destination and way to concretize the American dream influence the results of the mobility that they have. Ma Joad is a typical farmer that tends to concretize her dream by finding a fertile land, and therefore she stays in California, while Abel is a type of one that wants to achieve a higher level of society, therefore he prefers urban area, Boston to the fertile land of California. Abel finds opportunity to achieve the American Dream so that he tries to get a better job, from a butcher into an employee in a hotel. The awareness of upgrading his knowledge by learning English in his leisure time describes Abel's mobility. His upward mobility shows that Abel tends to adapt the changes, while Ma Joad still depends on one field of job, farming. Abel has a wider opportunity to gain upward mobility because his eagerness to learn something new and his starting occupation once he arrives in America as a butcher. As a butcher, at least he has something to earn, while Ma Joad does not have a good opportunity because she and her family have already been in such condition without jobs. This difference results a difference response. While Ma Joad tries to keep living by finding any job the family can have, so that food is the first priority, Abel can have a better expectation because he has already had a job, even though he starts as a butcher. This position results him to have leisure time to learn another skill, English.

## DISCUSSION

In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* does not meet the elements, and aspects of Adams' concepts of the American Dream because Ma Joad as a main character in the novels cannot achieve the concepts of the American Dream that are better, richer, and fuller life for everyone, with opportunity according to ability or achievement. She as an Okie does not opportunity to get

proper job California. In Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* meet the elements, aspects of Adams' concepts of the American Dream. Abel as main character can achieve the concepts of the American Dream because he as Polish has opportunity to achieve the concepts.

## CONCLUSION

The American Dream in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is unattainable but the American Dream in Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* is attainable. In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the main character fails to struggle achieving the concepts of the American Dream. She does downward mobility and achieves unattainable of the American Dream. But Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*, the main character does upward mobility and succeeds to struggle gaining the concepts of the American Dream. The novels have different cultures of the main characters. In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the main character is an Okie but in Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel*, the main character is a Polish.

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