The Grapes of Wrath
(20th Century Fox, 1940, 128 minutes)

Director  John Ford
Script   Nunnally Johnson
based on John Steinbeck’s novel
Producer Nunnally Johnson
& Darryl F. Zanuck

Henry Fonda   Tom Joad
Jane Darwell  Ma Joad
John Carradine  Reverend Jim Casey
Charley Grapewin  Grampa Joad
Dorris Bowdon  Rosasharn Joad Rivers
Russell Simpson  Old Tom ‘Pa’ Joad
O.Z. Whitehead  Al
John Qualen  Muley Graves

Eddie Quillan  Connie Rivers
Zeffie Tilbury  Gramma
Frank Sully  Noah
Frank Darien  Uncle John
Darryl Hickman  Winfield Joad
Shirley Mills  Ruth Joad
Roger Imhof  Thomas
Ward Bond  Policeman


HENRY FONDA (1905-1982) received an Academy Award best actor nomination in 1941 for his portrayal of Tom Joad in Grapes of Wrath, but it would be 40 years before he got an Oscar. In 1981 the Academy gave him an Honorary Academy Award, the prize the Academy sometimes gives when it worries that a major actor is going to die without ever having gotten up on that stage. The citation read: “The consummate actor, in recognition of his brilliant accomplishments and enduring contribution to the art of motion pictures.” They needn’t have worried: he received the award for best actor the following year for his work in On Golden Pond. Some of his other films are Jesse James 1939, Young Mr. Lincoln 1939, The Ox-Bow Incident 1943, My Darling Clementine 1946, Fort Apache 1948, Mister Roberts 1955, War and Peace 1956, 12 Angry Men 1957, Warlock 1959, the Longest Day 1962, Advise and Consent 1962, Fail-Safe 1964, and Cera una volta il West 1969 and Il mio nome è nessuno 1973.

NUNNALLY JOHNSON (1897-1977) wrote more than 60 screenplays, among them The Prisoner of Shark Island 1936 (which he also produced), Jesse James 1939, Tobacco Road 1941, Keys of the Kingdom 1944, The Gunfighter 1950 (also produced), The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit 1956 (also directed), Three Faces
Gregg Toland (1904-1948) was one of Ford’s favorite cinematographers. He was nominated for six Academy Awards: Les Misérables 1935, Dead End 1937, Intermezzo 1939, Wuthering Heights 1939 (he got the Oscar that time), The Long Voyage Home 1940, The Grapes of Wrath (1940), and Citizen Kane 1941. He was also cinematographer on Ford’s Academy Award-winning December 7th 1943 and Howard Hughes’s foray into Western low fashion, The Outlaw 1943.

The pounding of the rain decreased to a soothing swish on the roof. The gaunt man moved his lips. Ma knelt beside him and put her ear close. His lips moved again.

“Sure,” Ma said. “You jus’ be easy. He’ll be awright. You jus’ wait’l I get them wet clo’es off’n my girl.”

Ma went back to the girl. “Now slip ‘em off,” she said. She held the comfort up to screen her from view. And when she was naked, Ma folded the comfort about her.

The boy was at her side again explaining, “I didn’ know. He said he et, or he wasn’ hungry. Las’ night I went an’ bust a winda an’ stole some bread. Made ‘im chew ‘er down. But he puked it all up, and then he was weaker. Got to have soup or milk. You folks got money to git milk?”

Ma said, “Hush. Don’ worry. We’ll figger somepin out.”

Suddenly the boy cried, “He’s dyin’, I tell you! He’s starvin’ to death, I tell you.”

“Hush,” said Ma. She looked at Pa and Uncle John standing helplessly gazing at the sick man. 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.

Rose of Sharon whispered, “Will—will you all—go out?” The rain whisked lightly on the roof.

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. Ma got up quickly. “Come on, you fellas,” she called. “You come out in the tool shed.”

Ruthie opened her mouth to speak. “Hush,” Ma said. “Hush and git.” She herded them through the door, drew the boy with her; and she closed the squeaking door.

For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. 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. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.

John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath

The best book about Ford is Lindsay Anderson’s About John Ford (London: Plexus, 1999)

A great Grapes of Wrath web site: www.ac.wwu.edu/~stephan/Steinbeck/grapes.html

A transcript of the film members.xoom.com/_XMCM/scriptszone/scripts/the_grapes_of_wrath.htm

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