John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*: A Story of Man

Ned S. Hedges

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by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The works of John Steinbeck exhibit as much variety and versatility as those of any other American writer—indeed, almost as much as those of all other American writers. Consequently, the published criticism of Steinbeck's works is an extremely confusing miscellany. If the published critics of Steinbeck were to make any attempt at a unified expression concerning Steinbeck, the statement would be palliated by one red-penciled revision after another until nothing would remain but a few pink erasures. Only such an entry in the biographical section of a modern dictionary as the following might receive majority approval:

Steinbeck, John, 1902- . Am. novelist.
First rate writer of second rate books.

Steinbeck's apparent facility of craftsmanishp impresses the critics; his obvious versatility confounds them.

There is some perceptive criticism of Steinbeck, but there is a great deal more that is imperceptive and irrelevant. The criticism of the criticism is much more accurate. Peter Lisca, in the introduction to The Wide World of John Steinbeck (the only existing comprehensive study of Steinbeck as an artist), observes that reviewers have been consistent since 1950 in stating that Steinbeck is
no longer a writer to be taken seriously. "The irony is," declares Lisca, "that he seldom has been taken seriously insofar as this seriousness demands formal analysis of the works themselves."¹ In a useful anthology of critical articles entitled Steinbeck and His Critics, E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker conclude that the quality of criticism is hampered by the critics' tendencies to "start from assumptions of what a correct philosophy is and judge Steinbeck's fiction to be faulty because he does not agree with them."² And the critics have been restricted to a sheep-like following of the notion that Steinbeck's final reputation must eventually rest on the social message of The Grapes of Wrath, recognizing of course that he is an able local color writer with a tendency to treat men as animals. This is adherence to the "party line" so capably expressed by Edmund Wilson in The Boys in the Back Room, written, unfortunately, in 1941.

Steinbeck's critics have committed these errors because they fail to fulfill the first obligation of the critic: to accept the writer on his own terms and judge his success in accomplishing his own intentions. They allow the writer no province of his own. They do not respect the limitations the author imposes upon his own work, and they make no attempt to understand the principles of selection that the artist must apply to the materials available to him even within his self-imposed
limitations. In short, they attack Steinbeck's versatility, accusing him of attempting to be all things to all men; but they also attack each individual work because it is not all things to all men, or at least not enough things to enough critics.

Much of the muddled state of the criticism of Steinbeck may certainly be traced to Steinbeck's variegated productions and to the irresistible urge of the critic to classify. But Steinbeck's works generally defy classification. Even his philosophy as it is revealed in his work defies classification. He has labored conscientiously to retain his originality and freedom of expression and theme.

Many critics have heaped praise upon Steinbeck. This praise, unfortunately, has often been based upon misunderstanding, and when it is it undermines an accurate consideration of Steinbeck. Steinbeck seemingly has no fear of criticism as such, but he has a horror of misunderstanding. He is conscious of his reader, not of his critic. And if we may dare to make any generalization at all about Steinbeck, we can say that a desire for human understanding of humans has been his guiding principle throughout his career as a writer.

In carrying on a running battle with the critics during the latter part of his career, Steinbeck continually asserts that he pays no attention to criticism,
indeed that he rarely reads any of it. But he has been
influenced by the critics—not that he has changed his
attitudes toward the interpretation of the activities of
humans but that he has taken measures in his books to
alleviate any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of
his work. He has undoubtedly assumed that the reader's
understanding of a book is correlated to the critic's
writing about a book. Just what this attitude has done
to Steinbeck's method we shall see later. It appears that
his labors have been in vain.

But this paper is not to be an attack on existing
criticism. I must attempt to avoid the pitfalls I depre­
cate in others. My critical comment shall be centered on
East of Eden, primarily because it has been thoroughly
neglected and because it contains so much of Steinbeck's
earlier work and a positive new direction of that work.
The method will be to analyze the book closely in an attempt
to ascertain the intention of the author and to judge the
success or failure of the novel in the terms under which
it was written. By extension, recurrent themes and tech­
niques in previous novels must necessarily become a part
of such an analysis. Only after such a consideration can
a judgment be formed as to the relative merits of the
writing as a work of art and the relative merits of the
writer as an artist.
CHAPTER II
THE BOX

PASCAL COVICI

Dear Pat,
You came upon me carving some kind of little figure out of wood and you said, "Why don't you make something for me?"
I asked you what you wanted, and you said, "A box."
"What for?"
"To put things in."
"What things?"
"Whatever you have," you said.
Well, here's your box. Nearly everything I have is in it, and it is not full. Pain and excitement are in it, and feeling good or bad and evil thoughts and good thoughts—the pleasure of design and some despair and the indescribable joy of creation.
And on top of these are all the gratitude and love I have for you.
And still the box is not full.

JOHN
--Dedication of East of Eden

Even after only a cursory reading of East of Eden, it is apparent to the reader of Steinbeck that "nearly everything," the author has is in it. It seems at first to be a lengthy grab bag—certainly many of its critics have regarded it as little more. Obviously, Steinbeck conceived the novel as a climax in his career as a novelist; this "big" novel is the synthesis of his serious work up to the point of its writing. Yet it is more than the
total of Steinbeck's previous artistic expression: *East of Eden* has a tone and direction that indicate a growth in Steinbeck's art. Its genesis is the previous work, but it has an exodus all its own.

The importance of *East of Eden* in any consideration of Steinbeck is best exemplified by the author's own statement about it:

> I feel a little numb about this book. I think everything else I have written has been, in a sense, practice for this. I'm fifty years old. If "East of Eden" isn't good, then I've been wasting my time. It has in it everything I have been able to learn about my art or craft or profession in all these years.¹

To say that the writing of *East of Eden* was not a waste of time is very easy, but to determine its merit in critical terms is not easy. Peter Lisca has suggested that the critics who liked *East of Eden* are trying to talk themselves into something when they find reasons to praise it.² Surely such a method of criticism is sloppy, but is it entirely unjustifiable? If the author has demonstrated his ability to move the reader, even the experienced reader, is it not then a valid procedure to attempt to analyze the reasons for the effectiveness of the writing?

It is a curious box that Steinbeck has made. *East of Eden* contains a wealth of materials within an extremely complex structure. It is profitable to examine these materials particularly within the framework of the development of Steinbeck's art, but the essential critical problem of
East of Eden is its elaborate structure. It is immediately discernible that Steinbeck habitually writes on more than one level of meaning. Certainly, his writing would be glaringly conspicuous in the twentieth century if it admitted interpretation on only one level. Still, Tedlock and Wicker have seen fit to remark in "some conclusions" to their anthology of Steinbeck criticism:

There is a tendency to call him a realist and then to condemn him because he is not the critic's particular brand of realist—and this despite the fact that even in his early work it ought to have been apparent that Steinbeck characteristically worked through symbol and myth as well as some sort of verisimilitude and that to read him on only one level, that of mere story, was to miss the point.3

It would be more accurate to say that to read him on only one level, any one level, is to miss the point; for the tendency is not so much to read Steinbeck only on the story level but to read him only on the symbolic level or the "philosophical" level or on the "theme" level, ignoring the necessary articulation from one level to the others. But there are a number of perceptive critics who have recognized and treated Steinbeck's "levels of meaning."

Perhaps the most authoritative of these writers is Antonia Seixas (Toni Ricketts), who was once Steinbeck's secretary and the wife of biologist Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck's friend, business partner, and co-author of The Sea of Cortez. She has written:

For Steinbeck consciously writes on several levels. A look at Of Mice and Men will illustrate.
Three levels are apparent to the careful reader: the obvious story-level . . . a "social protest" level—and to this the great mass of readers was particularly susceptible . . . and a third level . . . . This is the symbolic level, on which the characters can be extended to any dimension. . . . The interpretations are limited only by the ingenuity of the interpreters.

But there is a fourth level. . . . It is conveyed by the phrase "non-teleological thinking."4

The basic narrative of East of Eden, the story of Adam Trask and his generations, can certainly be interpreted on these various levels. Joseph Wood Krutch notes,

Obviously the action is intended to be significant on three levels. In addition to being the story of certain individuals it is a story supposed to illustrate and typify certain phases in the cultural development of America. But that is not all or even the most important intention. Besides being individuals first and types second the characters are also something else—they are also symbols.

Here, so we are being told, is not only the story of certain families and the story of a frontier, but also the story of mankind.5

This system of interpretation on three levels (or more) is effective and sufficient in considerations of the "tight" novels, particularly Of Mice and Men, The Wayward Bus, and In Dubious Battle (which Steinbeck himself has called a "cold, brutal" book). These novels had been written under a tight rein, Steinbeck restricting himself to the dramatic intensity of the action involving the characters. But Steinbeck has constructed a very loose novel in East of Eden, using the novel as an extremely elastic vehicle for the freedom of his own expression in all sorts of areas. In East of Eden Steinbeck uses, as Mr. Krutch puts it,
"almost the whole repertory of novelistic devices." In addition to the dramatic development of the narrative, the author employs "panoramic descriptions, philosophic dialogues, and interpolated disquisitions" on a variety of subjects by a variety of techniques.

Consequently, an interpretation of the plot of *East of Eden* on no matter how many levels must result in, as Mr. Lisca calls it, the "essential failure" of the book, because there is so much in the novel that does not seem to "fit" the development of the narrative. Steinbeck was certainly aware of the difficulty of the structural pattern of the book, but he evidently worked out the pattern very carefully. In a letter to Pascal Covici during the publication of the book, Steinbeck wrote, "It's a kind of sloppy sounding book, but it is not sloppy really."

The essential problem of structure is similar to that which confounded the readers of *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which there are a number of chapters dealing with geographical description, economic problems of Oklahoma and California, machinations of ruthless used-car dealers or impersonal banks, explicit statements of Emersonian idealism, and a number of other apparently discordant subjects. It is similar to the dilemma of the whaling chapters in *Moby Dick* that continues to trouble Melville scholars. Steinbeck has written in *East of Eden* an extended narrative broken repeatedly by digressions, notably of two kinds: analyses of the historical and
cultural development of California and the United States from the time of the Civil War to World War I, and explicit observations in the first person on some philosophical and moral "habits" of humanity. The problem of structure is to determine whether these interludes are really digressions or whether they are necessarily related to the dramatic development of the plot.

More than five years before the final publication of East of Eden, Steinbeck had begun work on a book to be called "Salinas Valley" which was to relate the history of his ancestors beginning with their arrival in the Salinas Valley just after the Civil War. A year later, when the first draft was sent to his publisher, Steinbeck wrote a brief introduction to the manuscript in which he remarked, "The 'Salinas Valley' will be two books—the story of my country and the story of me." The nature of the book changed greatly before its publication as East of Eden in 1952. The emphasis of the narrative was changed from the Hamiltons, Steinbeck's maternal ancestors, to the generations of Adam Trask. The new theme was eventually recognized in the title by the change to East of Eden in June, 1951. But East of Eden is still "the story of my country and the story of me." It is not just the story of the Salinas Valley, but the story of the United States, and by extension, the story of the development of the human race. It is no longer the story of "me" as an individual, but of
which act on his characters so that the general situation as well as the particular incident is inescapable even to the casual reader. He had done the same thing in *The Grapes of Wrath*, but with less audacity. In the intercalary chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath* the narrator did not assert his philosophy with the bold "I" as he does in *East of Eden*.

Before examining the relationships between the two parallels of horizontal structure, it is pertinent to determine Steinbeck’s reasons for assuming the necessity for such a method. First, of course, he wanted to tell two stories, but certainly one reason for his method is involved in the critical treatment of his earlier books. After the publication of *Tortilla Flat*, early in his career, Steinbeck was much disturbed over the failure of critics and readers to recognize, or at least discuss, the obvious theme of the book in relation to its framework of the Arthurian cycle. He wrote to his agents:

> The book has a very definite theme. I thought it was clear enough. I had expected that the plan of the Arthurian cycle would be recognized. . . . The form is that of the Malory version—the coming of Arthur, and the mystic quality of owning a house, the forming of the Round Table, the adventures of the knights and finally, the mystic translation of Danny. The main issue was to present a little known and to me delightful people.

> Is not this cycle or story or theme enough? Perhaps it is not enough because I have not made it clear enough. Then I must make it clearer. What do you think of putting in an interlocutor, who between each incident interprets the incident, morally, aesthetically, historically, but in the manner of the paisanos themselves?

Never again has Steinbeck been willing to trust the reader
"me" as a member of the body of mankind.

Certainly it is an ambitious task to attempt either story. It is a monstrous task to attempt both, particularly within the concentrated form of the novel. Thus the materials with which Steinbeck struggles are exceedingly diverse, and the attempt to control them must result in an extremely elaborate structure. To recognize that this novel is written on a series of "levels of meaning" is helpful in analyzing the structure, but the real key to the problem is to recognize that it is also written on a series of "horizontal levels," or "parallels." None of the critics or reviewers has recognized, or at least treated, the horizontal structure as part of the pattern. They have been disturbed by the "lack of fictional concentration," or they have retreated into the certainty that the author has "tried to say too many things at once," or both. The only critic who has had anything to say about the horizontal structure of any of Steinbeck's work is Carlos Baker in a review of The Wayward Bus, when he recognized that it has "as subtle and neat a horizontal structure as Steinbeck has ever evolved." But the horizontal structure of The Wayward Bus is single—and "neat." The horizontal structure of East of Eden is dual—and complex.

One element of this dual horizontal structure is the basic narrative portion of the novel. Steinbeck traces the life of Adam Trask from the embryo conceived by his father
and mother through its stages of development and finally to the exercising of his power of humanity at the end of his life. This narrative contains lengthy considerations of his parents and his brother, Charles. Much of the story is a treatment of Adam’s Eve, Cathy the whore-monster, and her inherent evil. Huge portions of the first three parts of the book treat in minute detail the family of friend Samuel Hamilton, Adam’s prophet and teacher. Even the history of the Chinese servant Lee receives attention. And the fourth part of the book is almost exclusively devoted to the fulfillment of Adam’s destiny in a reworking of the Cain and Abel story involving Adam’s twin sons, Caleb and Aron. This seemingly episodic structure irritates some systematic readers because it involves many disturbances in continuity and time sequence. But by a careful handling of tone and atmosphere, Steinbeck succeeds in directing the emphasis constantly to the eventual influence on his central character and in sustaining a fine balance of tension and suspense with periodic relaxation.

The parallel element in this dual horizontal structure is more difficult to characterize. Steinbeck takes no chances with the limited understanding and interpretive powers of the reader; he is not content to let the reader generalize from the incidents of his narrative. In order to universalize his story and his characters, he interweaves comments on the social forces and social patterns
completely, and his idea of the interlocutor has grown. In the strike novel, *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck relegated the role of the interlocutor or interpreter to one of its characters, Doc. In *Of Mice and Men*, *The Moon Is Down*, and *Burning Bright* there is no interlocutor or interpreter because these novels were written in the exacting form of drama and had to forego the offstage voice, but certainly with disastrous results as far as the critical interpretations of the last two are concerned. The theory was further developed in *The Grapes of Wrath* when Steinbeck imposed through his interchapters the superstructure of social commentary and the scarcely veiled symbolism of the exodus to the promised land upon the narrative and the philosophical dialectic of Jim Casy. Then the method is fully developed in *East of Eden*, where Steinbeck himself assumes the position of the interpreter, leaving to his characters Samuel Hamilton and Lee only as much contemplative excursus as is necessary to the motivation of the future action of the narrative.

Steinbeck has often been accused of writing "pot-boilers," appealing to the desires of the broad population of book-buyers rather than to the small population of serious book-readers. These accusations are in part true, for Steinbeck has certainly been interested in developing the "average" man's understanding of himself. It should be apparent that his greatest enemy is middle-class morality;
and if he is to have a hand in correcting any of the errors and inconsistencies in middle-class thinking, he must direct his writing to those who would most profit by it. In recent years, Steinbeck has been working on a translation of Malory's *Morte Darthur*, trying to write it in "recognizable English" but with the tone, rhythms, and meaning of the original. He hoped that his version would be "a bridge between the scholarly few and the great mass of readers." Knowing such ideas one can understand Steinbeck's reasons for dwelling on explicit philosophical observations in *East of Eden*. For the writer to be misunderstood is for the writer to fail.

The perceptive, "professional" reader may deplore Steinbeck's method, and with some justification. He may wish that Steinbeck had left more for the imaginative projection of the reader—that he had not insulted the intelligence nor restricted the freedom of interpretation. But at the same time, perhaps the liberty of expression that such a method allows the writer is one of its best justifications. In *East of Eden*, Steinbeck has thrown off almost all restrictions and has allowed himself an amplitude that is perhaps notsurpassed within the form of the novel. He is not at all interested in obscurantism and half-truth. Steinbeck rather carefully stated this desire for freedom in an essay in rebuttal to the violent criticism of his play, *Burning Bright*:

> If a writer likes to write, he will find satisfaction in endless experiment with his medium. He
will improvise techniques, arrangements of scenes, rhythms of words, and rhythms of thought. He will constantly investigate and try combinations new to him, sometimes utilizing an old method for a new idea and vice versa. Some of his experiments will inevitably be unsuccessful but he must try them anyway if his interest be alive.

I have had fun with my work and I shall insist on continuing to have fun with it. And it has been my great good fortune in the past, as I hope it will be in the future, to find enough people to go along with me to the extent of buying books, so that I may eat and continue to have fun. I do not believe that I can much endanger or embellish the great structure of English literature.

I had a wise uncle who, coming upon me in my teens, with my chin down and shoulders bulging as I fought viciously for a highly problematical literary immortality, said as follows: "You know, if you succeed perfectly in doing what you are trying to do, the most you can hope to gain is the undying hatred of a few generations of undergraduates." Even at that age I was so impressed with his logic that I never put on the gloves with Maupassant or Proust again.

I just like to have fun with whatever equipment I have.12

*East of Eden* is the result of this constant experimentation; it does contain "everything I have been able to learn about my art or craft or profession in all these years." It seems only fair that we allow Steinbeck to choose the method that seems to him best for the elimination of misunderstanding. And we must allow him to have fun. It is apparent that the most "fun" Steinbeck can have is to speculate in broad terms, as he did in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* and as he does in the interchapters of *East of Eden*.

An understanding of one technique Steinbeck uses in relating the two parallel elements of *East of Eden* may come from a brief consideration of one of the significant ideas
explicit in The Log from the Sea of Cortez. This very interesting book is the narrative portion of The Sea of Cortez, a report of a biological expedition into the Gulf of Lower California by Steinbeck and his close friend and well-known biologist, Ed Ricketts. In addition to the data collected from the tide pools of the Gulf, it contains random speculations of the sort which Steinbeck obviously delights in. The primary concern of the expedition was the ecology of the tide pool. The focus on the interdependence of the life in the ecological universe of the tide pool forms the basis for the expression of an almost mystical belief in the interdependence of all forms of life. According to Steinbeck, the recognition of this interdependence is the foundation of all "religious" beliefs—no one thing may ever be separated from the "whole." As biologists, Steinbeck and Ricketts were primarily interested in the "relationships of animal to animal," but each species is at once the point and the base of the pyramid. . . . And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. . . . It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again. (p. 216)¹³

The narrative portions of East of Eden are like the animals in the tide pool, and the speculations the narrator makes about them, the comments of the interlocutor whatever his form may be at the moment of the comment, are the projection of the "whole."

Steinbeck once refused to write a political article
for a magazine, saying,

Generalities seem to solidify so quickly into stupidities. A writer can only honestly say—"This is the way it seems to me at this moment!"

. . . [He was] simply listening to men talk and watching them act, hoping that the projection of the microcosm will define the outlines of the macrocosm.14

Now this statement might raise a number of problems. Certainly, "the projection of the microcosm" sounds suspiciously as if it might develop into a "generality," but the important consideration here is the method of working from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from the specific incident to the universal, "from the tide pool to the stars."

Although the method of working out East of Eden was almost certainly from the concrete to the universal, the method of presentation is the reverse. The position of the interlocutor is reversed from that which Steinbeck evidently conceived in his comments on Tortilla Flat. In East of Eden the general situation is presented and interpreted first; then the succeeding narrative portion illustrates particular facets of the preceding disquisition.

The method is not so much to universalize the particular, but to particularize the universal. The reader must look from the stars to the tide pool and then back again to the stars, and Steinbeck adjusts the telescope. This is the same method that the author used in The Grapes of Wrath, the method that Peter Lisca praises as making The Grapes of Wrath "a great novel" but condemns as the "essential
failure" of *East of Eden*. Steinbeck had previously experimented with other methods of universalizing his characters and his theme. His most original and at the same time most ineffectual attempt was in *Burning Bright*, a play written in novel form. Steinbeck attempted to write in "universal language" a drama about sterility, a subject which he felt was of universal interest but which had suffered universal neglect. Each of the three acts has a different setting—Act I, the Circus; Act II, the Farm; and Act III, the Sea—though the characters remain essentially the same. The stage presentation was disliked by the critics and eventually failed, though Steinbeck seemed to think the audiences enjoyed the play and understood the shifting of setting as a method to universalize the theme. After observing so much experimentation in Steinbeck's writings, one assumes that since *East of Eden* occupies such an important position in Steinbeck's work ("Everything else I have written has been, in a sense, practice for this") the author uses the method of presentation that he feels will be most effective.

The most significant of the interchapters are the introductory chapters to each of the four parts of *East of Eden*. Each one sets the tone and explicitly states the subject matter for the following section. In the first two chapters of the novel, just over ten pages in all, Steinbeck very carefully foreshadows most of the essentials of his novel. Chapter 1 presents a brief physical
description of the Salinas Valley and a brief history of
the stages of its habitation. It ends, "And this is about
the way the Salinas Valley was when my grandfather brought
his wife and settled in the foothills to the east of King
City." (p. 7) Chapter 2 begins with a short history of
the Hamiltons [Steinbeck’s grandparents], characterizes
the people involved in the westward migration of the latter
half of the nineteenth century, and attains its climax with
"Such a man was Adam Trask." (p. 13) This simple statement
may well be the most important paragraph in East of Eden.

In these few pages Steinbeck establishes the tone and
 technique of his novel, and clearly symbolizes the "story."
The story of East of Eden, on the highest level of meaning,
is the "one story in the world"—the eternal struggle be-
tween good and evil. In the third paragraph of the novel,
the mountains bounding the Salinas Valley (Eden) establish
a dichotomy between the two opposite forces:

I remember that the Gabilan Mountains to the
east of the valley were light gay mountains full
of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation,
so that you wanted to climb into the warm foot-
hills almost as you want to climb into the lap of
a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains
with a brown grass love. The Santa Lucias stood
up against the sky to the west and kept the valley
from the open sea, and they were dark and brooding
—unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in my-
self a dread of west and a love of east. (p. 3)

And then too in the first chapter are the descriptions
of the good years and the bad years, the years of rain
and the years of drought, exhibiting the pattern of nature
and symbolizing the cyclical periods of dominance and decline for each of the contestants in the struggle for the souls and minds of men.

Just before the presentation of mankind in the form of Adam Trask, in whom lies the battleground of the struggle, Steinbeck places an assertion of the dignity and freedom of humanity:

It is argued that because they believed thoroughly in a just, moral God they could put their faith there and let the smaller securities take care of themselves. But I think that because they trusted themselves and respected themselves as individuals, because they knew beyond doubt that they were valuable and potentially moral units—because of this they could give God their own courage and dignity and then receive it back. (p. 12)

And immediately following, one discovers the reason Steinbeck feels impelled to make such an assertion, to write novels, to attack complacency:

Such things have disappeared perhaps because men do not trust themselves any more, and when that happens there is nothing left except perhaps to find some strong sure man, even though he may be wrong, and to dangle from his coattails.

Certainly it is as a moralist that Steinbeck wants to be taken, and he does not want to gamble with the reader’s misunderstanding.

The techniques Steinbeck employs to establish his position and eliminate misreading are immediately recognizable. The bold "I" of flexible opinion and reminiscence takes over in the second paragraph. The interdependence of all elements of nature operates immediately, and the
mystical union of man, nature, and history arises on the second page: "And it seemed to me sometimes at night that I could feel both the sea and the redwood forest before it."

The first speculative digression appears on the second page:

The Salinas was only a part-time river. The summer sun drove it underground. It was not a fine river at all, but it was the only one we had and so we boasted about it—how dangerous it was in a wet winter and how dry it was in a dry summer. You can boast about anything if it's all you have. Maybe the less you have, the more you are required to boast.

Steinbeck establishes the fluidity of his expression and his freedom as a writer in the very beginning of the novel. When he reaches the end of the second chapter and the account of Adam's arrival in California, the reader has arrived at the same point at which eventually he emerges from Part One of the novel. In between, Steinbeck rapidly traces the histories of Adam Trask, the Hamiltons, and Cathy Ames. The first two chapters prepare for the first two stories, and the story of Cathy is introduced later by the same speculative voice of Mr. Steinbeck: "I believe there are monsters born in the world to human parents." (p. 72)

These three separate narratives, all dealing essentially with emotional complexities of familial relationships, provide overtones of conflict necessary for the development of the dramatic alliances among the three stories. Steinbeck has chosen to develop two of the narratives by alternating parts of them. He shifts back and forth between the
Hamitons and the Trasks, but treats the story of Cathy without interruption until she has become a part of the Trask story. Such a method must result in disruptions of continuous development within a time sequence. Many of the critics of *East of Eden* have been disturbed by these discontinuities, but it is obvious from the first two chapters that all of the strands will become inextricably woven in Part Two. Since the reader is aware that the three narrative elements will eventually converge, there should be no real problem in shifting rather abruptly from one element to another. Steinbeck has attempted to keep Part One from breaking into three distinct parts, and by very carefully suggesting the eventual meeting of the major figures in time and setting, and by foreshadowing his eventual theme in the first two chapters of the novel, he has brought together in the Eden of the Salinas Valley the necessary ingredients for the dramatic development of the thesis: good is there in the person of Samuel Hamilton, evil is there in the person of Cathy, and mankind, Adam, is in between.

The other three parts of *East of Eden* follow the same general pattern of development. The speculative voice of the narrator takes over early in each part, and the action gradually intensifies, dramatically illustrating the psychological or historical implications of the philosophic digression. The beginning of Part Two coincides with the
beginning of a new century. The opening chapter is a pas-
tiche of colloquialisms and mixed emotions—the indestruct-
ible faith in betterment of the future mixed with the regret
that things are not as they used to be:

To hell with that rotten century!
Let's get it over and the door closed shut on
it! Let's close it like a book and go on reading!
New chapter, new life. . . .

Ch, but strawberries will never taste so good
again and the thighs of women have lost their
clutch! (p. 130)

The narrative and historical developments in Part Two exem-
plify the essential optimism of man in his dreams of the
future and the disillusionment that comes when the dreams
are shattered or remain unfulfilled. Adam Trask's dream for
establishing a dynasty in his own Eden is shattered by the
temporary triumph of evil; the cultural establishments of
men—the school, the law, the church, even the whoreshouse—
are eventually recognized as failing to fulfill the purposes
for which they were created.

Part Three extends the cycle of disillusionment which
dominates Part Two. Early in Part Three, Steinbeck rele-
gates the function of philosophic disquisition to the Chi-
nese servant Lee in a reconsideration of the Cain-Abel myth.
Lee has discovered in the words "Thou mayest" the "glory"
of man, who even in rejection and defeat can pick himself
up from the broken pieces of his shattered dreams and
"choose his course and fight it through and win" because
the soul of man "is always attacked and never destroyed."

(p. 304)
Adam Trask, in fighting his way out of the grayness caused by the loss of his Eve and the destruction of his dream for Eden, exhibits the resiliency of man in defeat.

The process of destruction and rebuilding always goes on in society—the society represented by the members of the Hamilton clan. The historical and cultural growth of human institutions does not advance so rapidly as that of Adam Trask, however, because man in the mass has not yet discovered "the choice." The dynasty of Samuel Hamilton reaches its height only after it has already begun its decline. A reunion of the Hamilton clan signals the dissolution of the Hamilton empire; the first fruit of Samuel, Una, has committed suicide and Samuel himself has finally been made aware of his own mortality. After Samuel performs his mission in the dramatic structure of the novel by using his "choice" to shock Adam Trask out of his lethargy and ignorance, Samuel dies. With Samuel dies the dream of a Hamilton dynasty.

All the dreamers among the Hamiltons, the impractical ones intent on idealistic goodness, fade away—first Una, then Samuel, Dessie, and Tom. And the impractical elements of the social community gradually decline with them. Only the practical ones remain to go about the task of rebuilding. The California society becomes pragmatically opportunistic, consumed by desire for success and respectability—a society composed of Will Hamiltoms. The growing self-realization
of Adam Trask in the cycle is contrasted to the self-blinding tactics of the Will Hamiltons and their Babbitt-like convolutions in the struggle for economic superiority.

But this is not all. There are still some Adam Trasks in the world with their "glory that lights up the mind of the man." (p. 131) There are still some dreamers. There is still the "net of good and evil." (p. 413) And there is still the glory of the choice between them. Once again, Part Four begins with the speculative voice of the narrator, reiterating in explicit terms the "story of mankind."

I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one, that has frightened and inspired us, so that we live in a Pearl White serial of continuing thought and wonder. Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil. . . . There is no other story. (p. 413)

The exemplification of that story is the rest of East of Eden—a retelling in almost two hundred pages of the sixteen verses of Genesis which recount the Cain and Abel myth.

Thus, Steinbeck works from the generalities of speculation to the particulars of dramatic incident. And in asserting his freedom and his right to speculate, the author allows the reader freedom for objective observation, for disagreement, for interpretation. In the Log from the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck asserts,

The safety valve of all speculation is: It might be so. And as long as that might remains, a variable deeply understood, then speculation
does not easily become dogma, but remains the fluid creative thing it might be. (p. 265)

In the development of non-teleological thinking so pre-eminent in the same book, Steinbeck explains that non-teleological ideas "consider events as outgrowths and expressions rather than as results." (p. 135) The structure of East of Eden, considered within such a context, must necessarily be "loose."

Nevertheless there are specific devices which fuse the two parallels of the horizontal structure of the book. There is, as we have just examined it,

the speculative voice of Mr. Steinbeck himself, a kind of democratic chorus that broods on implications of the action, but is itself, in this role, entirely separate from the action. . . . The tone of this book, the bold ease with which the "I" takes over at the outset and appears and disappears and reappears throughout, both holds it together and gives it its originality, the relaxations of its freedom.15

There is an extremely complex system of cross references used to relate and universalize. The basic narrative level of the events in the lives of people in the Salinas Valley follows the actual historical development of the region. The Hamiltons, without whom there would be no story of Adam Trask, act as ties between the dramatic narrative and the cultural development of the country. The repetition of various aspects of familial relationships—brother with brother, father with son, husband with wife—acts as a kind of glue to unite the individuals with the story of mankind. The list of techniques the author uses to interrelate, to
integrate, and to expand the elements and materials of his story could go on and on. Many of these are external devices; but the book is most tightly held together by the fact that it is a story on all levels of Adam Trask, the story of the struggle within him between the positive forces of good and evil, and the choice that he discovers is his right as a member of the race of men. This story is both the glue and the contents of the box.
CHAPTER III

THE CONTENTS

*East of Eden* begins with the juxtaposition of good and evil and with Adam Trask; it ends with Adam Trask and his choice—to rise above the evil of resentment and hatred to bequeath the freedom and moral responsibility of "Thou mayest" to his son. Thus, Joseph Wood Krutch fails to capture the essence of *East of Eden* when he titles his review of the novel "John Steinbeck's Dramatic Tale of Three Generations." Claude-Edmonde Magny more nearly discloses the import of *East of Eden* when she calls it a "formally composed narrative of a family during two generations, with a hint that . . . the two generations . . . represent several others." But Steinbeck has failed his intention if he has given only a "hint" that the generations of *East of Eden* represent several others; he intends to shout that the generations of Adam represent all others. Structurally, *East of Eden* is the formal story of the moral development of Adam Trask— one generation. Symbolically, the glory which eventually penetrates Adam's bewilderment and disillusionment is the affirmation of the latent, intrinsic glory of humanity—all the generations of Adam.

Adam Trask is not only an individual undulating in his
own net of good and evil, but he is also a type, a repre-
resentative, and a symbol. All of the dominant characters
in *East of Eden* have the same levels of relevance. Because
of his concentration on characters as types or symbols,
rarely has Steinbeck created in his work an individual who
seems to have real existence outside the pages within which
he is created. There are some notable exceptions: Ma Joad
of *The Grapes of Wrath,* "Doc" of *Cannery Row,* *Tortilla Flat,*
*Sweet Thursday,* and "The Snake," based on Steinbeck's close
friend, Ed Ricketts; Junius Maltby of *The Pastures of
Heaven;* Jody of *The Red Pony,* undoubtedly based on Stein-
beck's own boyhood; Elisa Allen of "The Chrysanthemums." In
his longer fiction, Steinbeck is usually more concerned with
his major characters as types or symbols than he is with
them as realistic individuals. In order to symbolize a spe-
cific quality through a particular character, Steinbeck
selects for observation only those fragments of the actions
and personality of the character that have direct ramifica-
tions for the symbolic extension. The result is that many
of his characters seem "one-dimensional" on the narrative
level. This apparent lack of complexity results partly from
his purpose and partly from his method. Before the publica-
tion in 1933 of *To A God Unknown,* Steinbeck wrote to his
agents, "The book was hellish hard to write. . . . It will
probably be a hard book to sell. Its characters are not
'home folks.' They make no more attempt at being human than
the people in the Iliad."² The development of the principal characters in Steinbeck's fiction reflects this attitude throughout his career.

Steinbeck's method of presentation does not allow a complete understanding of his characters, perhaps because he does not attempt to understand them completely himself. His method is external, objectively concentrated on observable action rather than on the thoughts that produce them. Rarely does he focus directly on the characters' psychological and intellectual machinations. His method is the opposite of the Jamesian method of exploring all the nuances of an individual's mental operation through a series of oblique glances into the very seat of the intellect. When Steinbeck does allow the reader to examine the mental workings of his characters, it is always from the speculative distance of his "It might be so." This is a method not necessarily to be condemned, but to be understood. It is certainly consistent with Steinbeck's theory of non-teleological thinking in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, which attempts to answer at most "the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why." (p. 135)

The characters in East of Eden for the most part are presented from this objective point of view.

Frequently, the speculative voice of the author attempts to penetrate the minds of some of the characters, notably, Samuel Hamilton, Tom Hamilton, and Cathy. But the
attempt at understanding is never completely successful; for Steinbeck reserves mysterious recesses in these unfathomable personalities that cause even the speculative observer to falter. The enigma of evil which is the center of Cathy must remain inexplicable; the dark pools which are the innermost habitations of the human mind in which the Tom Hamiltons struggle for reality may never be sounded.

There is difficulty in "believing" most of Steinbeck's characters because there is difficulty in identifying completely with them. Steinbeck exploits his peculiar sensitivity to the emotional and moral strengths of the downtrodden for the purpose of making the reader understand and sympathize with his characters, not to identify with them. But the thematic implications of East of Eden create the necessity for identification with Caleb and Adam Trask. Only in the case of Caleb Trask does Steinbeck offer an unobstructed view of the internal workings, the ambivalent intricacies and motivations of the human mind in turmoil. The completeness of this presentation cannot be spared; for Cal is symbolic of each of us, the descendants, the generations of Adam. In Cal the reader can recognize the complexity of his own fears, his own desires, his own hopes, his own filth, and his own purity. Steinbeck listens in even on Caleb's praying:

"Dear Lord," he said, "let me be like Aron. Don't make me mean. I don't want to be. If you will let everybody like me, why, I'll give you anything in the world, and if I haven't got it,
why, I'll go for to get it. I don't want to be mean. I don't want to be lonely. For Jesus' sake, Amen." Slow warm tears were running down his cheeks. (pp. 379-80)

And this is the universal prayer of mankind. A close identification with Cal is necessary to the symbolic significance of *East of Eden*: the Cain-Abel story of Genesis is the chart of the universal human soul, which cannot bear rejection and desires only to be loved. "Every man is potentially Cain (including Abel). It is impossible to live without feeling guilt and without feeling unjustly rejected and inadequately loved."3

The difference in tone in Part Four of the novel is largely a result of this "internal" treatment of the character of Caleb Trask, and this difference in tone may lure the reader into the false conception that the book has shifted its emphasis away from Adam Trask. If this were so the book would fall apart; its special kind of coherence would be lost.

But Adam Trask is the most significant slide under the microscope, and Steinbeck observes him in the cold light of objectivity. Never does the narrator attempt to penetrate the motivations of Adam; yet he must reveal him as the most universal actor in the drama. The individual character of Adam Trask is never clearly defined, but it cannot be. Adam's maturity is the maturity of mankind. He acts according to his most fundamental nature; his actions are reflexive and characteristic of his species. He is self-centered,
intent on survival and fulfillment. In his bewilderment, he is slow to comprehend and react to the forces which buffet him from every side, but he is stubborn. And with an assist from Goodness and encouragement from Friendship he is eventually able to consume enough of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to arise from the pit of remorseful confusion into which the guileful seduction of Eve has dropped him. His evolution toward fulfillment is faltering, but persistent. His will to survive and discover his humanity is the tenacity of the group animal, the species.

Adam Trask cannot be separated from the "theme" of *East of Eden* any more than he can be separated from the dramatic incidents in which he plays an active role. The "story" of *East of Eden* is the story on all levels of Adam. As Miss Magny observes,

Rather than being a story it is a myth or parable, and this is the quality that gives the book its poetry, its incantatory power . . . .

This mythicization of the characters, which magnifies them and gives them their meaning, is never simplified; therein lies the strength of Steinbeck's story.4

The extension of the character of Adam Trask is the character of Steinbeck's novel. Adam Trask has meaning in *East of Eden* on at least four levels: (1) the individual on the basic story level, (2) the type representative of universal emotions and motivations, (3) the type representative of the growth and maturity of a culture (the "social protest" level), and (4) the symbol extended to the full meaning of
The first level of meaning in any of Steinbeck's works is the basic dramatic narrative in which his characters are involved. Usually the critics, in their haste to rush on to "bigger" things, casually discard the story level of most of Steinbeck's novels. It is a pity to dismiss the consideration of Steinbeck as a story-teller so cavalierly, because he is a master of narration. Ironically, his compelling style sometimes may create some of the misunderstanding he so wishes to avoid. As Antonia Seixas pointed out,

... he is such an excellent story-teller that readers can't see the woods for the trees. They pegged him as a Communist after The Grapes of Wrath because he portrayed so movingly the plight of the dispossessed Okies—losing sight of the deeper symbolism embodied in the turtle slowly, blindly crossing the road.

The reviewers chortled over the humor, quaintness, and the charm of Cannery Row, while the critics, who must take things seriously, handed Steinbeck everything from a slap on the wrist for sentimentalizing bums and loafers, to a poke in the nose for abdicating his role as reformer and pretending that life isn't terribly, terribly earnest.5

Steinbeck's tales are powerful, provocative, and never dull. Many of his scenes border perilously on the sentimental; but with some exceptions, he is able to avoid sentimentality by retaining a proper emotional distance from his characters. His dramatic incidents erupt with a "jagged intensity" (as reviewer Mark Schorer has called it), but Steinbeck usually succeeds in softening the effect by supplying an abrupt "tough-minded" climax, utilizing a dash of
humor or even of vulgarity. Just when he is on the point of sentimentalizing by too tightly twisting the emotions or losing suspense by trying to sustain it too long, Steinbeck strategically provides relaxation through one of his roving speculations, one of his delightful marginal anecdotes, or an ironic turn of humor. In East of Eden, after Adam has come out of his shell, Lee decides to go to San Francisco and finally realize his dream of opening a book store. Just six days later, Lee, Adam's inestimable friend as well as servant, and mother-by-proxy of the twins, comes home. Adam asks,

"How about your bookstore?"
"I don't want a bookstore. I think I knew it before I got on the train, but I took all this time to make sure."
"Then there's your last dream gone."
"Good riddance." Lee seemed on the verge of hysteria. "Missy Tlask, Chinee boy sink gung get drunk."

Adam was alarmed. "What's the matter with you anyway?"

Lee lifted the bottle to his lips and took a deep hot drink and panted the fumes out of his burning throat. "Adam," he said, "I am incomparably, incredibly, overwhelmingly glad to be home. I've never been so goddam lonesome in my life." (p. 419)

Steinbeck's special dramatic technique deserves a more detailed analysis than we may give it here, but his method can be considered briefly. He builds up his writing, whether it be within the unit of the entire book, the chapter, or even the paragraph, by presenting the general situation at some length, then sprinting through the particular action of the specific incident, ending abruptly with a
powerful climax in cryptic prose. This can perhaps best be exemplified by a brief passage which completes the account of Adam Trask's mother:

She searched her mind for some proper egotistical humility and almost happily arrived at the sacrifice—herself. It took her two weeks to write her last letter with revisions and corrected spelling. In it she confessed to crimes she could not possibly have committed and admitted faults far beyond her capacity. And then, dressed in a secretly made shroud, she went out on a moonlight night and drowned herself in a pond so shallow that she had to get down on her knees in the mud and hold her head under water. This required great will power. As the warm unconsciousness finally crept over her, she was thinking with some irritation of how her white lawn shroud would have mud down the front when they pulled her out in the morning. And it did. (pp. 15-16)

The overall plan of *East of Eden* is similar: a leisurely preparation for a rapid sequence of specific dramatic events accelerating to a powerful climax.

Steinbeck seems to be aware that the general reader can enjoy a good story without really concerning himself with metaphysical or philosophical problems, and even when the author himself is primarily concerned with more cosmic affairs he furnishes a story to delight the reader. He frequently laces his narrative with humor; the frog hunt of *Cannery Row* is one of the funniest episodes in American prose. And occasionally he does tell a story just because it is interesting. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, he relates of his story, "The Snake":

A thing happened one night which I later used as a short story. I wrote it just as it happened. I don't know what it means and do not even answer
the letters asking what its philosophic intent is. It just happened. . . . [a very brief synopsis of the story is inserted here] Whether the woman was driven by a sexual, a religious, a zoophilic, or a gustatory impulse we never could figure. When I wrote the story just as it happened there were curious reactions. One librarian wrote that it was not only a bad story but the worst story she had ever read. A number of orders came in for snakes. I was denounced by a religious group for having a perverted imagination, and one man found symbolism of Moses smiting the rock in the account (p. xxiv).

Steinbeck is not beyond telling a simple story because it is fun, and he is not beyond inserting an anecdote in his long fiction because it is "just" interesting. He may be, and often is, accused of writing a story badly, but he may never justifiably be accused of writing a bad story.

It is an artificial exercise to separate the levels of meaning of *East of Eden* precisely, for the vertical structure of the novel is articulated carefully and any particular element may be disentangled from its total implications only with an arbitrary imprecision. The complexity with which the elements of the dual, "horizontal" structure blend with the elements of the vertical structure compounds the difficulty of analysis. It is convenient and necessary to simplify. Not only does the component of the novel directly involving the characters have significance on several levels, but the parallel "historical-philosophical" component also has relevance on more than one level of meaning. Thus, on the second level of meaning in the narrative structure, the story of Adam is related to at least two levels of meaning.
in the dual structure: the westward movement and the persistent unfulfilled dreams of man. Harvey Curtis Webster says of *East of Eden*, "It is to be doubted if any American novel has better chronicled our last hundred years, our trek from East to West to discover an Eden that always somehow escapes us and that we as a people yet continue to hope for and believe in." Adam Trask is a type representative of the movement westward—the growth and historical development of the western part of the nation; but his story also exemplifies the higher level of meaning in the dual structure—the existence of a dream cycle inherent in the process of evolutionary maturity.

Adam blindly pursues a dream for building an Eden with his Eve and creating a dynasty in it. He is betrayed by Eve and his dream is shattered; Adam revives himself to have more dreams, only to have them shattered in turn; but always he is able to salvage enough of the pieces to create another dream. He stumbles, he is buffeted, he is repulsed, but he never retreats all the way—he makes faltering progress, although like the symbolic turtle of *The Grapes of Wrath*, "His yellow toe nails slipped a fraction in the dust." (p. 22)

The shattering of illusion is the first step in the growth to maturity, and it is always painful. Steinbeck submits in *East of Eden*,

When a child first catches adults out—when it first walks into his grave little head that adults
do not have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just--his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child's world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing. (pp. 19-20)

Sometimes the shattering of illusions is fatal: it was to Tom Hamilton, it was to Dessie Hamilton, and it was to Aron. But the spirit of humanity is carried on by those who are fit enough to survive. Steinbeck uses the cycle of dream and disillusionment throughout his work. It goes all the way back to his first novel, Cup of Gold. It is the organizational principle of The Pastures of Heaven, a series of independent short stories held together only by a common setting in an "enchanted valley" and the fact that the characters of each of the stories reap unhappiness through the unintended destructive influence of one family. The inhabitants of the valley are secure in the knowledge that they are living in a dream world of paradise on earth until they are subtly disillusioned by the blight that seems to have fallen on the valley. Steinbeck's major intention in Of Mice and Men was to symbolize through Lennie the unfulfilled dreams ("earth-longings," Steinbeck called them) of all men. The dream cycle is essential to the parable of the novelette, The Pearl. Traces of it may be found in almost all of Steinbeck's books and stories.
In his characters, Steinbeck develops the dream sequence through the longing for pastoral retirement. But in the mass mind, the dream assumes a restlessness that is almost biological in its compulsion for progressive mutation. In "The Leader of the People," the boy Jody's grandfather examines the urge for westward movement:

It wasn't Indians that were important, nor adventures, nor even getting out here. It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. I was the leader, but if I hadn't been there, someone else would have been the head. The thing had to have a head.7

This recognition also encompasses the group-man theory so essential to In Dubious Battle, which Steinbeck develops thoroughly in The Log from the Sea of Cortez by speculations on the ecological relationships of animals in the tide pool. The movement westward, the exodus, the irresistible advance of man propelled by an idea is brought to epic quality in The Grapes of Wrath. Adam Trask's dreams, disillusionment, and the self-realization that comes from the recognition of evil as the force which resists advance and is the instrument of disillusionment are representative of the universal motivations of humanity in its striving for maturity.

The third level of meaning in East of Eden exhibits Steinbeck's concern for the inconsistent standards notable in the moral tone of modern society, especially as exhibited in social, economic, and cultural institutions. Malcolm
Cowley, perplexed after his first reading of Cannery Row, reread the book and stated that if it was a cream-puff, it was a "very poisoned cream-puff." Steinbeck has remarked that if Cowley had "read it yet again, he would have found how very poisoned it was." The specific, explicit social criticisms of The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle were easily recognizable, but the implicit, veiled social criticism of much of Steinbeck's other writing is not so apparent to the casual reader. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row lie, steal, and cheat; they are filthy in their lechery. The "100 percent Americans" condemn Steinbeck as a communist for the "propagandistic" depression books; the prudish "protectors of moral virtue" condemn him for glorifying and sentimentalizing the dregs of human society in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row. These "100 percent Americans" and "protectors of the moral virtues" would perhaps be even more indignant if they were to recognize Steinbeck's real purpose in these novels, if they were to recognize that these books are not political tracts or harmless, off-colored, quaint, local color novelties. In treating the downtrodden, even the errant, with sympathetic sensitivity, Steinbeck is not necessarily setting them up as the epitome of moral excellence; he is trying to expose the warped sense of values that operates in society when these people, who abound most of all in the virtues professedly to be desired in a modern social community—tolerance, kindliness, and
generosity, are the failures in the social structure.

Lincoln R. Gibbs, discussing the problem of the vulgar-
ity and ribaldry of Steinbeck's subjects and language,
remarks:

One suspects that Steinbeck would cheerfully
plead guilty to the charge of deliberately shock­
ing the respectables. Convinced as he is that
many of them are Pharisees, and deeply impressed
by the graces and virtues and wrongs of the
proletarians, he would be somewhat less than
human if he did not now and then delight in ruf­
fling the composure of prudes and making them
squirm.

Steinbeck overdoes this matter, but his license
of speech does not spring from a vile mind; it
springs from the heart of a rebel who hates cant
and injustice. Many years ago Dr. Holmes, apostle
of decorum and consummate flower of the genteel
tradition, told us that there are many swearing
saints and praying devils in the world. At the
very worst, Steinbeck's indecencies should be
condoned for the sake of the art and understanding
he provides. Probably they are most strongly
resented by the very persons who ought most to
listen to what he has to say.9

It is not by chance that Steinbeck chooses to introduce evil
into East of Eden in the personification of a whore. The
brothel takes advantage of the illusory puritanicalness of
middle-class morality by attracting through the back door
the "respectables" who wish to satisfy in a respectably
hypocritical fashion the desires for relaxation and femi­
nine companionship that they cannot satisfy in the prudish
formality of their own homes. Steinbeck does not glorify
the bawdy house in East of Eden or sentimentalize the
"whore with the heart of gold" as he is prone to do in
some of his other novels. He does speculate briefly on
"celebrated madams" and some of their inherent virtues, but he primarily presents the brothel as a convenience for the dissembling righteous. There is no essential immorality in prostitutes or in the front-door customers of the whorehouse, only in the "respectable" back-door clientele. Perhaps Steinbeck does shock the respectables, certainly he must have intended to, when he wrote in *East of Eden*.

And finally comes culture, which is entertainment, relaxation, transport out of the pain of living. And culture can be on any level, and is. The church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously. And each would have been horrified to think it was a different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels. (p. 217)

The evil of Cathy is able to operate in the whorehouse only because of the corrupt "respectability" of the men she blackmails. It is significant that Adam Trask never visits a whorehouse except to face Cathy and recognize her evil and his ability to triumph over it. In the modern American system of morality and ethics, the things one must do to gain the social respect of his fellows automatically alienate their love. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck says that man "might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox," for there is a strange duality in the human which makes for an ethical paradox. We have definitions of good qualities and of bad; not changing things, but generally considered good and bad throughout the ages and throughout the species. Of the good, we think always of wisdom, tolerance, kindliness,
generosity, humility; and the qualities of cruelty, greed, self-interest, graspingness, and rapacity are universally considered undesirable. And yet in our structure of society, the so-called good qualities are invariable concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are the cornerstones of success. A man--a viewing-point man--while he will love the abstract good qualities and detest the abstract bad, will nevertheless envy and admire the person who through possessing the bad qualities has succeeded economically and socially, and will hold in contempt that person whose good qualities have caused failure. . . . Actually he would rather be successful than good. (p. 96)

This is essentially the message of Cannery Row, the poison in the cream puff. Mack and the boys are the true philosophers because they are true to the code of their own internal society; and this code, in contrast to the code of "respectable conformity" of their critics, is based on the good and true things in the community of mankind. This is also the essential message of the third level of meaning in East of Eden.

The minor characters of East of Eden obtain their greatest significance on this level. They serve as the links between the dual elements of the superstructure of the novel, and they are so involved in both that it is at times impracticable to attempt to place them. They are the particulars in the narrative structure, but at the same time they are the tools with which Steinbeck constructs his universals. The purpose of these minor characters is to present a contrast to Adam Trask and firmly establish the development of the institutions of the society in which he
lives. The failures in *East of Eden* are the dreamers; they gain love, but never respectability.

Adam fails to conform to the restrictions of a society intent upon economic success. When he does begin a business venture, he does so because he has an "impractical" idea that he might be able to ship lettuce to the East, preserving it with ice. He is never concerned with financial gain, and he loses all through a series of accidents.

The boys heard the reaction in Salinas. Adam was a fool. These know-it-all dreamers always got into trouble. Businessmen congratulated themselves on their foresight in keeping out of it.

Will Hamilton recalled that he had not only argued against it but had foretold in detail what would happen. He did not feel pleasure, but what could you do when a man wouldn't take advice from a sound businessman? And, God knows, Will had plenty of experience with fly-by-night ideas. In a roundabout way it was recalled that Sam Hamilton had been a fool too. And as for Tom Hamilton—he had been just crazy. (pp. 438-439)

But Adam has the satisfaction that his dream has an element of truth. His reaction to the disaster is, "I still believe it will work. . . . Cold does preserve things." (p. 439) In his failure, Adam has happiness in the satisfaction of being true to an idea; in their success, the Will Hamiltons have only the unhappiness of unfulfillment deep within themselves.

Conformity to the code of middle-class success destroys the creative power of mankind. As Steinbeck sees it, the restriction of conformity and mass thinking is the immediate danger facing man in the modern world. In *East of Eden*, he establishes his position through the speculative observer;
And I guess a man's importance in the world can be measured by the quality and number of his glo-
ries. It is a lonely thing but it relates us to the world. It is the mother of all creativeness, and it sets each man separate from all other men.

I don't know how it will be in the years to come. There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know. Some of these forces seem evil to us, perhaps not in themselves but because their tendency is to eliminate other things we hold good. It is true that two men can lift a bigger stone than one man. A group can build automobiles quicker and better than one man, and bread from a huge factory is cheaper and more uniform. When our food and clothing and housing all are born in the complication of mass production, mass method is bound to get into our thinking. In our time mass or collective production has entered our economics, our politics, and even our religion, so that some nations have substituted the idea collective for the idea God. This in my time is the danger. There is great tension in the world, tension toward a breaking point, and men are unhappy and confused.

At such a time it seems natural and good to me to ask myself these questions. What do I believe in? What must I fight for and what must I fight against?

And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion, or government which limits or destroys the individual. This is what I am and what I am about. I can understand why a system built on a pattern must try to destroy the free mind, for that is one thing which can by inspection destroy such a system. Surely I can understand this, and I hate it and I will fight against it to preserve the one thing that separates us from the uncreative beasts. If the glory can be killed, we are lost. (pp. 131-2)

This is not only a tract opposing totalitarian political systems. It also attacks a too rigid conformity to a system of false morality and economic respectability which it
considers just as dangerous as the restriction of a political system and even more insidious because it gradually attacks a society in its greedy unawareness.

Adam Trask is the only character in *East of Eden* who is able to adjust to the demands of society without compromising his own dreams or his own humanitarian instincts. He reaps the scorn of the practical ones when his dreams lie in the dust, but he has enough faith in himself and in his dreams that he is never destroyed. He lacks a clear understanding of others and even of himself, but he does comprehend enough of his own humanity to care more for love than respectability. This is not evidence of idealism in Steinbeck, nor of sentimentalism or primitivism. Steinbeck is not trying to say through Adam Trask that the human community will eventually be perfected and be laved by a warm eternal sea of brotherly love. He is not trying to say that man should return to the natural goodness of his primitive state. For Steinbeck, evil as well as good is a positive force at loose in the world. The best chance that man has for even limited happiness in the midst of his frustration and disillusionment is to adhere to the constant qualities "generally considered good . . . throughout the species."

The social commentary of *East of Eden* through the dramatic extension of representative types and the voice of the speculative observer insists upon a reassessment of the moral code within which the institutions of society function.
Ultimately a man is judged by the results of his struggles in the net of good and evil which constantly envelops him, and he can contend with these forces most effectively only after a truly compassionate understanding of the human soul. The desired state of happiness is love, not respectability.

In *East of Eden*, Steinbeck asserts:

> And in our time, when a man dies—if he has had wealth and influence and power and all the vestments that arouse envy, and after the living take stock of the dead man's property and his eminence and works and monuments—the question is still there: Was his life good or was it evil? . . . Envies are gone, and the measuring stick is: "Was he loved or was he hated? Is his death felt as a loss or does a kind of joy come of it?"

> In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty men want to be good and want to be loved. Indeed, most of their vices are attempted short cuts to love. When a man comes to die, no matter what his talents and influence and genius, if he dies unloved his life must be a failure to him and his dying a cold horror. It seems to me that if you or I must choose between two courses of thought or action, we should remember our dying and try so to live that our death brings no pleasure to the world. (p. 415)

There is implicit in this passage the recognition that the choice between good and evil exists unrestricted in the human species. The fourth level of meaning in *East of Eden* is the recognition and affirmation of the power of the choice. The sluggish but persistent awakening to the recognition of the creative glory of the choice is the story of man.

On the highest level of meaning in *East of Eden*, the characters of the story are symbols of elements in the eternal story of mankind. The structure of this symbolism
is not simple, and may become as extended and elaborate as the individual reader may wish. It is indeed "limited only by the ingenuity of the interpreters," as Antonia Seixas has remarked. One might discover that on the highest level Adam symbolizes mankind, Cathy symbolizes the positive force of evil, Samuel Hamilton is representative of good, Lee of compassionate and understanding friendship. No matter how complete such a system of interpretation becomes, it can never be quite satisfactory in its minutest detail because of the extreme complexity of the symbolic characteristics and cross-references of the novel itself.

Steinbeck explicitly proclaims the ubiquity of the contest between good and evil in the lives of men at the beginning of Part Four of his novel:

A child may ask, "What is the world's story about?" And a grown man or woman may wonder, "What way will the world go? How does it end and, while we're at it, what's the story about?"

I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one . . . . Humans are caught --in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too--in a net of good and evil . . . .

We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is venerable as nothing else in the world is. (p. 413, 415)

The vehicle for telling this one story throughout East of Eden is the Cain and Abel story. The symbolism of the major characters is based on the story told in the first sixteen
verses of the fourth chapter of Genesis. But the Cain and Abel story is itself, as Steinbeck sees it, a symbol story. The extension of the symbols of Steinbeck’s story is the same as the extension of the symbols in the Genesis myth. On the highest level of meaning then, the characters of *East of Eden* are not only symbolic of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, but also allegorical in the same sense that these characters are allegorical.

There are literally hundreds of parallels and allusions to the Genesis story in *East of Eden*. The first letters of names of the characters (Adam, Aron, Abra, Ames—Cyrus, Charles, Caleb, Cathy) are significant. The brutality of murder and symbolic murder, the repetition of sacrifice, and the hatred and revenge that come from rejection all allude to the Old Testament story. The Cain and Abel story itself is worked over thoroughly at least four times: it is apparent in the brother-brother-father relationships of Adam, Charles, and Cyrus Trask in Part One of the novel; it is read from the King James Bible and interpreted explicitly in Part Two of the novel; it is reinterpreted as the major theme of the book in Part Three; and the Caleb-Aron narrative is its specific parallel in Part Four.

Steinbeck’s interpretation of the myth is for the most part orthodox. He gives his initial explicit interpretation of the myth through Lee during the naming of the twins:

I think this is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody’s story. I think
it is the symbol story of the human soul. . . .
The greatest terror a child can have is that he
is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears.
I think everyone in the world to a large or small
extent has felt rejection. And with rejection
comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in
revenge for the rejection, and with the crime
guilt—and there is the story of mankind. I think
that if rejection could be amputated, the human
would not be what he is. . . . The human is the
only guilty animal. . . . Therefore I think this
old and terrible story is important because it is
a chart of the soul—the secret, rejected, guilty
soul. Mr. Trask, you said you did not kill your
brother and then you remembered something. I
don't want to know what it was, but was it very
far apart from Cain and Abel? (pp. 270-1)

While Steinbeck was working on *East of Eden*, he continually
demanded commentaries on the book of Genesis from his agents,
so it is not surprising that the interpretation should be
in accord with most of the professional theological exeges-
eses. The basic interpretation of the myth is consistent,
for instance, with that of theologian Herbert Edward Ryle:

The religious teaching conveyed by the story of
Cain and Abel relates to the subjects of sin, man's
fallen nature, and the attitude of the Almighty to-
wards the sinner.

As to sin, it teaches that propensity to it is
transmitted from one generation to another. . . .
Cain, according to the teaching of Israelite theo-
logy, personified the action of sin in human
society.

As regards human nature, the picture of Cain
and Abel portrayed how, from the first, opposition
has subsisted between good and evil, between faith
and self-will, between obedience and lawlessness.
. . . But Cain is a free agent. He is under no
compulsion to obey God. He is at liberty to
hearken to or to reject the voice that comes to
him. His sin is the outcome of the abuse of his
free-will . . . which he has received by inher-
itance from the first parents.

Not least, the narrative teaches the interde-
pendence of the human race, the obligations which
we are under, the one to the other. The lesson
that we are our "brother's keepers" has been little learned.  

Mr. Ryle's commentary, written more than forty years before *East of Eden*, sounds surprisingly like an interpretative review of Steinbeck's novel.

It is central to the theme of the novel that every man has within him the qualities of Cain. In order to further impress this "true state" of the human condition, Steinbeck has Samuel Hamilton say, "But Cain lived and had children, and Abel lives only in the story. We are Cain's children." (p. 270) According to orthodox theology, all the descendants of Cain perished in the Flood. But this deviation from orthodoxy is minor, and not to be quibbled about. It is not even certain that this is Steinbeck's error; it may only be Samuel Hamilton's. As a matter of fact, Steinbeck does have some precedent for most of the variations in his retelling of the story.  

That mankind has inherited a propensity to sin is important, but it does not really matter whether the propensity has descended through Cain or whether it is inherited through Adam from the Fall.

In so much of Steinbeck's work, an implicit excuse for the evil in a man, or at least a mitigation of it, lies in the ignorance and natural innocence of his characters. The sensitivity with which Steinbeck treats the members of the substrata of society in so many of his stories (Lennie, Johnny Bear, the Joads, the paisanos) is the recognition of
the fundamental good in the least significant members of humanity and by contrast the recognition of the worst in the more exalted members of the race. But in *East of Eden* Steinbeck recognizes both good and evil in all men and proclaims the moral responsibility that every man has for his own actions. This understanding of the state of mankind results in true compassion for his unhappiness rather than maudlin pity for his misfortune.

Steinbeck imposes the responsibility for action on man, not Providence, through Lee's reinterpretation of the Genesis story. After the first consideration of the Genesis story during the naming of the twins, Adam professed that there was comfort in the story.

"How do you mean?" Samuel asked.
"Well, every little boy thinks he invented sin. Virtue we think we learn, because we are told about it. But sin is our own designing."
"Yes, I see. But how does this story make it better?"
"Because," Adam said excitedly, "we are descended from this. This is our father. Some of our guilt is absorbed in our ancestry. What chance did we have? We are the children of our father. It means we aren't the first. It's an excuse and there aren't enough excuses in the world. (p. 269)

Thus, Adam searches for the easy way out of his sense of sin and guilt, just as Caleb does later. But this is not enough for Lee; he must force the responsibility of humanity on Adam, and he must convince Caleb that he can rise above the evil he feels he has inherited from his mother.

Lee's answer to the question of whether inherited guilt
is the excuse for the inhumane actions of men is the heart of *East of Eden*. Lee was perplexed by one sentence in the King James version of the story, "And thou shalt rule over him." He discovered other translations, and in his perplexity consulted a group of old Chinese scholars in his family. They studied Hebrew for two years, and then, Lee reports to Adam and Samuel Hamilton,

And this was the gold from our mining: 'Thou mayest.' 'Thou mayest rule over sin.' The old gentlemen smiled and nodded and felt the years were well spent.

The American Standard translation [Do thou rule over him] orders men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in 'Thou shalt,' meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word *timshel*--'Thou mayest'--that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if 'Thou mayest'--it is also true that 'Thou mayest not.'

... Now, there are many millions in their sects and churches who feel the order, 'Do thou,' and throw their weight into obedience. And there are millions more who feel predestination in 'Thou shalt.' Nothing they may do can interfere with what will be. But 'Thou mayest!' Why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win.

... It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself into the lap of deity, saying, 'I couldn't help it, the way was set.' But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice, a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there. ... But this--this is a ladder to climb to the stars. ... You can never lose that. It cuts the feet from under weakness and cowardliness and laziness.

... And I feel that I am a man. And I feel that a man is a very important thing--maybe more important than a star. This is not theology. I have no bent toward gods. But I have a new love
for that glittering instrument, the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked and never destroyed—because 'Thou mayest.' (pp. 303-4)

To attempt to further explain this passage would be presumptuous and anticlimactic.

The excitement of the power of the choice sustains the rest of *East of Eden*, even through the almost too-obvious retelling of the Cain and Abel story. Adam Trask achieves his greatest glory at the end of *East of Eden* when he is able to rise above the evil feeling of hatred and revenge that the symbolic murder of his son and himself produces. Even though the "voice of [Caleb's] brother's blood crieth unto [Adam] from the ground," Adam in his infinite compassion bequeaths to the murderer, his son, the glory of the choice.

Adam looked up with sick weariness. His lips parted and failed and tried again. Then his lungs filled. He expelled the air and his lips combed the rushing sigh. His whispered word seemed to hang in the air:

"Timshel!"

His eyes closed and he slept. (p. 602)

"And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden."
Certainly it is as Steinbeck states in the dedication of *East of Eden*, "Nearly everything I have is in it." The techniques of structure, narration, language, description, characterization, and symbolic extension are those which he has developed through constant experimentation with his medium. But *East of Eden* is not an experiment. In his overwhelming desire to make understandable a theme which he believes is of fundamental importance to modern society, Steinbeck has attempted to select those methods which he has found to be most successful in his previous work. And he has made a serious, careful attempt in *East of Eden* to make his thesis persuasive through a truly compassionate, at times humorous, understanding of the human soul and through his consummate skill as a story-teller.

The structure of *East of Eden*, though complex, loose, and perhaps "sloppy sounding," is very carefully considered. Steinbeck may be a questionable philosopher, but he is an exceedingly able craftsman in every respect, and it is

*According to Tedlock and Wicker (Introduction, p. xiii), Steinbeck kept a running journal of thoughts and plans of *East of Eden* during its composition. He placed this record in a box on the cover of which he had carved
inconceivable that he would spend five years writing a book without very carefully working out its structure. There are, however, many facets of *East of Eden* that deserve criticism. The characterization is admittedly weak when his characters are compared with a standard of "ordinary" people. Because of the constant repetition of the Cain and Abel story and the hundreds of symbolic and specific allusions to it and to the combat between good and evil, the theme of *East of Eden* is, as Peter Lisca remarks, badgered into "an uninteresting obviousness. . . . Steinbeck keeps worrying his theme until there is nothing left for his or the reader's imagination."¹ Other critics have wished that many of the generalities presented by the interlocutor might have been presented dramatically through fictional concentration, allowing the reader to interpret them utilizing his own intellectual power. There are in the novel awkward disruptions of time sequence development. The detailed consideration of a mass of minor characters produces an episodic effect. Such comments certainly contain some validity, and the faults they call attention to detract from the artistic

the Hebrew characters of the Timshel symbol. Tedlock and Wicker report: Writing later ("The Mail I've Seen," The Saturday Review, August 4, 1956, p. 16), Mr. Steinbeck said, "In *East of Eden* I made an error in the spelling of Timshol. I spelled it Timshel. I have had over a hundred letters pointing out my mistake, and many of them from profound scholars of Hebrew."

The "misspelled" vowel has the sound of aw in the English word *law*; hence *timshawl* would be an even more accurate transliteration than *timshol*. 
effectiveness of the novel. Steinbeck was certainly aware of these limitations, but he consciously chose to use the methods that produced them to fulfill his higher purpose.

Much of the superfluity of *East of Eden* may certainly be explained—perhaps mitigated though not excused—by recognizing the fact that Steinbeck introduced them to make misunderstanding practically impossible. He felt compelled to "badger his theme into an uninteresting obviousness" so that it would be evident to his non-intellectual audience, for it is to the great middle class that he writes. He does not do this from a violent anti-intellectualism (of which he has often been accused), but from a conviction that the middle class reading public is precisely the audience that needs most to heed the messages of his writing. Consequently, his theme is explicit, his characters are transparently symbolic, and his message is repetitive. Steinbeck has had too much experience with misinterpretation to take chances with the limited powers of his audience.

Ironically, much of the misunderstanding that Steinbeck fears may be attributed to his own skill as a writer. Edmund Wilson observes,

> I believe that his virtuosity in a purely technical way has tended to obscure his themes. . . . He is such an accomplished performer that he has been able to hold people's interest by the story he is telling at the moment without their inquiring what is behind it.

Steinbeck's facility of rapid narration and his occasionally bantering tone perhaps make it too easy to read him on only
a basic, "story" level. His obvious attempt to universalize by moving from the general to the particular and his attempt to dramatize by building up to a series of climaxes break the narrative continuum into episodes. His sensitivity to emotion tends to produce sentimentality, and his selective, objective approach in the development of character tends to produce characters with a lack of depth, complexity, and motivation. But *East of Eden* is a tremendously powerful novel, interesting, provocative, and compassionate. Above all, it contains the excitement of the affirmation of the essential glory of man that exists in his power to choose his course.

This excitement and the moral responsibility it depends upon point a new direction in Steinbeck's writing, if not in his thinking. The theme of *East of Eden* on its highest level of meaning is an answer to the charges of sentimentality and impractical idealism that have been aimed at Steinbeck throughout his career. In this novel, Steinbeck clearly asserts his moral position. The direction of a continued progressive evolution of the human species is dependent upon a re-examination of the fundamental claims of morality within the social, economic, and cultural structures of modern society. Steinbeck does not proclaim that this re-examination and resultant improvement are imminent; he does not believe only in the innate goodness of natural man or the ultimate perfectibility of the human species.
There is innate evil as well as good within the creative soul of man. The relevant message of *East of Eden* is that man must recognize the elements of good and evil within himself and he must recognize that he has the power to choose between them. The hope for the future is that man will be able to choose the course that will allow him to live in harmony with his fellowman, without hatred and cruelty and avariciousness, but with love and a humanitarian awareness of the interdependence of all elements of society. This hope may only be realized by certain mutations of the species, and apparently the mutations in the society of modern man are now occurring in the wrong directions.

In the journal he kept during the composition of *East of Eden*, Steinbeck presents an affirmation of his philosophy of writing:

> The writers of today, even I, have a tendency to celebrate the destruction of the spirit and God knows it is destroyed often enough. It is the duty of the writer to lift up, to extend, to encourage. If the written word has contributed anything at all to our developing species and our half-developed culture, it is this--great writing has been a staff to lean on, a mother to consult, a wisdom to pick up stumbling folly, a strength in weakness and a courage to support weak cowardice. And how any despairing or negative approach can pretend to be literature I do not know. It is true that we are weak and sick and ugly and quarrelsome but if that is all we ever were, we would, millennia ago have disappeared from the face of the earth and a few remnants of fossilized jaw bones, a few teeth in a strata of limestone would be the only mark our species would have left on earth. (Cf. *East of Eden*, p. 309)\(^4\)

Surely life is spurious and baffling, but it is after all,
for Steinbeck, worth living because there are just enough
men who find the glory within themselves to make Steinbeck
believe and profess with his consummate skill and power as
an artist that "Thou mayest!"

Joseph Wood Krutch concludes his review of *East of Eden*
by saying,

The merits of so ambitious and absorbing a book
are sure to be widely and hotly debated. The
final verdict will not, I think, depend upon the
validity of the thesis which is part of a debate
almost as old as human thought or upon any pos-
sible doubt concerning the vividness of Mr. Stein-
beck's storytelling. On the highest level the
question is this: Does the fable really carry the
thesis; is the moral implicit in or merely imposed
upon the story; has the author recreated a myth or
merely moralized a tale? There is no question
that Mr. Steinbeck has written an intensely inter-
esting and impressive book.5

Certainly the thesis of *East of Eden* could be inferred from
the dramatic narrative of the novel without quite so much
help from the philosophic, metaphysical discourses of the
narrator and the characters. The fable could carry the
thesis, but if it were made to, Mr. Steinbeck's book would
be less impressive. It would lack the fluidity and facile
readability that are its outstanding qualities. If he had
attempted less in a more restricted fashion, Mr. Steinbeck
would almost certainly have had less fun in writing it and
the reader less fun in reading it. As it stands, *East of
Eden* is an intensely interesting and impressive, and
entertaining book.
NOTES

Chapter I


Chapter II

1From a sketch of the author by Bernard Kalb appearing with a review by Harvey Curtis Webster, "Out of the New-Born Sun," The Saturday Review, XXXV (September 20, 1952), p. 11.

2Lisca, pp. 265-6.

3Tedlock and Wicker, p. xli.


6Quoted by Lisca, p. 265.

7Also quoted by Lisca, p. 262.


From a letter to C. V. Wicker of January 16, 1957, quoted by Lisca, p. 79.


In this thesis, page references will be made in parentheses following quotations from Steinbeck's major works when the source is noted in the context. (For bibliographical information on Steinbeck's writings, see BIBLIOGRAPHY: Texts.)

From a letter to the editors of Occident quoted by Lisca, "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 13.


Chapter III

1Perspectives USA, Number 5 (Fall, 1953), p. 147.

2Quoted by Gannett, p. 56.

3Webster, p. 12.

4Magny, pp. 149-51.

5Seixas, p. 276.

6p. 11.


8Reported by Antonia Seixas, p. 276.


It is possible, for example, that Steinbeck may have received some information from Luther's Commentary on Genesis, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), Vol. I, pp. 92-8. In these pages Luther comments that Cain and Abel were not only brothers, but twins. He also
believed that the words spoken by the Lord in the Genesis version were actually spoken by Adam.

Chapter IV

1 The Wide World of John Steinbeck, pp. 268-9.

2 At times, some critical remarks about East of Eden are absurd. Peter Lisca, a very astute critic of Steinbeck, for some reason attacks East of Eden vitriolically, and his evidence seems rather flimsy. I cannot agree with Mr. Lisca, for instance, when he complains acrimoniously of the "failure of language" in the novel. He cites as horrible examples: "But he didn't seem to care whether we caught trout or not. He needed not to triumph over animals." "Abra was a strong fine-breasted woman, developed and ready and waiting to take her sacrament--but waiting." "Oh, strawberries don't taste as they used to and the thighs of women have lost their clutch!" Certainly these sentences have a "scrambled syntax," but they are peculiarly effective in expressing exactly what the author intended them to. There is no other way to say exactly the same thing or convey the same connotations so economically.

3 The Boys in the Back Room (San Francisco: The Colt Press, 1941), pp. 41-2.

4 Quoted by Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, pp. 259-60.

5 Krutch, p. 1.
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Selected Criticism and Reviews


