

John Steinbeck's East of Eden - A Study in Human Development

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East of Eden: A study in human development

The characteristics of people are formed by multiple factors. In many situations, children are raised under similar conditions, however, their later characteristics and life choices are very different. In the book, *East of Eden*, author John Steinbeck explores the [development](#) of humans, from childhood, to adulthood, and eventually, to death. [East of Eden](#), by John [Steinbeck](#), is a genealogical novel about the lives of the Trasks, particularly the main character in the book, Adam Trask. Along the way, the Hamiltons, Ames, and many other characters are introduced. Steinbeck makes a point of showing the continually changing nature of some characters, while describing the ceaseless staticness of others. In *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck presents his views on the construction of human behavior and the components that are incorporated in it.

Setting is an important element in *East of Eden*. Described are beautiful, panoramic views of the surrounding landscapes of the Salinas Valley, California. "The Salinas Valley . . . is a swale between two ranges of mountains. . . . On the wide level acres of the valley,

the topsoil lays deep and fertile. . . . Under the live oaks, shaded and dusky, the maidenhair flourished and gave a good smell, and under the mossy banks of the watercourses whole clumps of five-fingered ferns and goldy-backs hung down" (Steinbeck p. 480). Steinbeck then goes on to describe the human history of these areas. The groups of peoples that lived there are described in sweeping generalizations. "First there were Indians, an inferior breed without energy, inventiveness, or culture . . . their warfare was a weary pantomime. Then the hard, dry Spaniards came explor...

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...dies the original Hebrew text and finds that the verb used there is "timshel." Timshel's literal English translation is "thou mayest." During the course of the book, Steinbeck transforms the word into a metaphor for a style of living. It comes to describe the freedom of choice in one's life. Steinbeck recognizes the fact that one's environment can affect them. However, he also recognizes one can work with what they are given and make the best of it. Steinbeck best sums up these views in a dialog between Samuel and Adam.

"You can't make a racehorse of a pig," said Adam.

"No," said Samuel, "but you can make a very fast pig" (659).

Works Cited

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath, The Moon is Down, Cannery Row, East of Eden, Of Mice and Men*. New York: Heinemann/Octopus, 1979. pp.475 - 896.

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