

Impotency of money in east of eden



The plot of Steinbeck's *East of Eden* has the issue of money tightly woven in with the stories of most of the main characters. On the surface money seems to be accepted by the society and serves as the solution to all problems; on numerous occasions, the wealthy are able to afford the best lands and latest technologies. However, a closer look reveals that money is actually quite powerless. Often Steinbeck features the affluent characters as being dispirited with their surroundings or roles in life. As a result, through his treatment of characters in *East of Eden*, Steinbeck suggests that financial success cannot buy happiness and love, but can only lead to isolation from society. Many characters try to buy love, but are unsuccessful. Cyrus, for example, creates suspicion rather than admiration from his sons. "' I think he stole the money,' Charles said miserably," upon reading Cyrus's will (69). He feels betrayed by his father whom he loves. Even Adam, who never mourned Cyrus' death but instead accepted and used his share of inheritance freely, remarks " He was a thief... He stole from the G. A. R." (582). Cyrus' wealth leaves an imprint of remorse instead of respect on his sons. Charles, reciprocally, tries to purchase his father's love. He spends six bits on a knife for Cyrus' birthday, which goes unappreciated - " Where's that knife?... I never even saw him hone it" (29). Mad at the lack of attention he receives for his expensive gift, Charles tries to take out his anger on his innocent brother. Adam does not try to get his father's attention, but instead lavishes money and attention on his wife and son Aron, where it is futile. Cathy leaves the ranch as soon as she is well enough and Aron never bothers to tell his father anything. Adam's carefully thought-out gift to Aron is not cared for, " He didn't take the gold watch" (573). Interestingly, just like the previous generation, while the father is busy chasing after the son that doesn't love

him, his other, neglected son is busy finding ways to be noticed by the father. Cal works hard on a large and valuable present of fifteen thousand dollars for his father, only to have it rejected and told that it doesn't match up to his brother going to college. " I would have been so happy if you could have given me - well, what your brother has - pride in the thing he's doing, gladness in his progress. Money, even clean money, doesn't stack up with that" (544). All these unavailing attempts show that money is insufficient to purchase love. Instead of benefits, money can actually lead to isolation. In East of Eden, the wealthy characters are often secluded from the society. Both Adam and Charles, rich from their father's will, have enough to live on comfortably so that they do not have to work and therefore interact with others. Yet Charles, even though he's rich, is such a miser that he " Never spent a dime. He pinched a dollar until the eagle screamed" (372). He labors like crazy on the farm and never has any fun. Even little amounts gets bickered, " You remember when you sent me a telegram for a hundred dollars? You never paid it back" (108). Charles even wants to buy his brother out so that he will not be bothered (107). His brother, Adam, also takes advantage of his financial stability by wallowing in self-pity after Cathy leaves. His wages to Lee guarantees that he and his sons will be fed and their house will be cleaned for. He never bothers to pay visits to any neighbors because since he has money, he thinks that he does not need help from them. The Trask brothers are not the only ones separated from their surroundings because of their money. Will feels isolated in his family because of his different views on success and life. " I am the only one who ever made a dime," Will remarks proudly, trying to hide his hurt feelings of being the outsider (436). Will's greed for money is so strong that he forsakes

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happiness for it. " He hated Fords with a deadly hatred, but they were daily building his fortune" (364). He hates his job and never even bothers to understand the things that are making him rich: " Will Hamilton, puffing under the burden of his new fat, explained the workings of a mechanism he did not understand himself" (364). Will is the only one in his family to care about money. However, due to his feeling left out, he even speaks badly of his much-beloved father, making Adam comment in surprise, " You make Sam Hamilton sound like a criminal" (436). Will, Adam, and Charles' actions reflect that wealth is a factor that promotes isolation. In Steinbeck's novel, the happy characters do not care much about money. Sam Hamilton is greatly loved despite his financial status, " The daughters of Samuel Hamilton were not destined to become work-destroyed farm wives. They had a pride that transcended their poverty. Samuel raised a distinctly superior breed" (147). He is constantly praised by his neighbors, to whom he is always courteous and kind. " Mr. Hamilton maybe hasn't got four bits put away, but he's our people and he's as good as we got. And he's raised the nicest family you're likely to see" (140). His achievements are not judged on his bank notes but instead on his morals, character, and family. Sam is always more concerned about changing things for the better and never gets mad at the patent firms for selling his ideas for their own profits. Steinbeck constantly quotes Sam whenever another character is thinking about the meaning of life. Even long after his death, Sam is well remembered in Lee's memory: " he had so much, he was rich. You couldn't give him anymore. Riches seem to come to the poor in spirit, the poor in interest and joy" (583). Therefore, happiness and love may be obtained by all, with no regard to materialistic values. Money is not the solution to problems in East of Eden. It

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results in unhappiness as attempts to buy love fail. The wealthy also end up isolated from the society. Instead, it is the kind and generous people that end up happiest. As Lee sums up nicely, “ Money’s easy to make if it’s money you want. But with a few exceptions people don’t want money. They want luxury and they want love and they want admiration” (541).