

The usage of language in east of eden



With its intricate, complex plot infused with an abundance of emotional turmoil, John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* is indeed successful in fulfilling its author's intention to rip a reader's "nerves to rags." As one finally becomes satisfied with the novel's progression, Steinbeck orders a dramatic turn of events which transforms the satisfied mindset of the reader into hair ripping frustration within a matter of seconds. Thus, with descriptive imagery, use of theme, and specific diction, Steinbeck without a doubt succeeds in failing to satisfy his reader and is able to elicit vivid reactions.

Steinbeck opens *East of Eden* with detailed descriptions of setting. It is noticed that his description of Salinas Valley in the beginning of the novel parallels with the theme and future progression of the story. He introduces his theme of "balance" and the comparison of good and evil in an analogy to the setting; he describes his childhood in the Salinas and states, "I remember the Gabilan Mountains to the east of the valley were light gay mountains [...] The Santa Lucias stood up against the sky to the west [...] they were dark and brooding - unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east" (Steinbeck 1). Gabilan vs. Santa Lucias, loving vs. brooding, east vs. west, birth vs. death, good vs. evil; already the author alludes that there will always be a bad side to everything, which causes the readers' angst. Situations where the reader temporarily becomes satisfied changes as the "bad" to the "good" steps in. In his description of the Valley, the author also mentions blue flowers, and how the white flowers tend to bring out the blue. By placing contrasting colors or events together, one would stand out more. Therefore, by placing the "bad" with the "good," the "bad" seems worse. The ups and downs, the bad and

good, the unsatisfied and satisfied, contribute to the emotional turmoil that the active reader experiences.

Furthermore, the ambivalent nature of the story inhibits the reader from maintaining a single emotion and a single mindset, as Steinbeck is able to turn the story around instantaneously. When Adam meets Cathy, the readers know that Cathy is evil, though Adam is seemingly oblivious. After she recovers, he pops the question, “ A surge of love filled him. ‘ Will you marry me?’” (Steinbeck 120). Adam’s naïve and innocent words of love causes agitation within the reader. Nearly every single individual, both book character or reader, knows the true nature of Cathy. On the other hand, Adam’s common sense is clouded and disillusioned by his love for her. When he asks her to marry him, already the reader is able to anticipate an unfortunate future that has yet to come. These turn of events give the readers an uncontrollable urge to toss the book and shout at the characters – and perhaps the author – “ WHY?” Adam’s proposal to Cathy is one of many events that have caused an intense reaction in the reader.

At times, the mood is absolutely ominous. Other times, the mood is playful. With his specific diction, Steinbeck is able to alter his tone and the readers’ emotion however he pleases. He thoroughly enjoys the use of figurative language, especially similes, metaphors, or any type of comparison. By utilizing comparison, Steinbeck is able to put any situation on an intensity scale and give either a negative or positive connotation. At one point in the story, Adam speaks to Eva, Kate’s assistant. Eva’s reply is noticeably cold and uninviting, as “ the girl’s voice took on the edge of a blade sharpened on a stone” (Steinbeck 315). The specific word choice indicated in the metaphor

is the very sharp edge of a blade. Steinbeck very well could have merely used “ the girl’s sharp voice” but instead chooses to portray the girl’s voice as the sharpness of a blade. He specifically utilizes this phrase to insinuate that her voice, though sharp, is also murderous, dangerous, and able to kill like a blade. In this situation, the blade metaphor makes the uninviting mood even more uninviting. One of many of Steinbeck’s uses of extremely descriptive word choice and figurative language, this quote furthermore gets on the readers’ nerves and engraves into his or her head a lifelong impact.

One final relation, which is extremely significant to the story, is the term “ timshel,” or choice. Though of course there is a contrast between good and evil, Steinbeck weaves “ timshel” into this plot. Each man is given a choice of which path to choose. The unpredictable nature of decisions; the unpredictable, and sometimes disappointing, result of “ timshel,” leaves the reader in a state of angst and exasperation. Steinbeck is ultimately successful in causing emotional turmoil within a readers’ mindset with his descriptive imagery, unique twist to plotline, and specific word choice. “ I’ve done my damndst to rip a reader’s nerves to rags, I don’t want him satisfied,” and indeed Steinbeck easily achieves this goal.