

### Discussion Questions for *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

1. In the novel, Steinbeck develops certain themes that relate to the creation myth, and applies them to California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These themes include the following (among others):

- The actual creation of the world (notice Steinbeck's treatment of the stages of California's settlement in chapters 1 [1] and 1[2])
- The animosity of the pair of brothers Adam/Charles; Aron/Cal
- The introduction of evil into the world, personified by Cathy

Does he do an effective job of conveying the meaning of the Genesis myths in each of the above examples, while at the same time developing an effective story of the Trask and the Hamiltons?

2. Which of the two brother pairs (Adam/Charles, Aron/Cal) is more effective in drawing a parallel to the Cain/Abel myth of the Bible? Which of the brother pairs is more effectively portrayed in the novel?
3. Is the character of Cathy sufficiently developed to be the personification of evil in the novel? (Steinbeck portrays her as committing a number of heinous acts, including murder, lying, covetousness, adultery and hatred of her parents. Steinbeck does not overtly attribute hatred towards God to Cathy (which would complete her evil qualities), but are we to assume this as part of her character)? Despite this list of terrible qualities, does she have sufficient "weight" to be the personification of evil?
4. The character of Lee is well-developed in the novel. He acts as a sounding board for Aron, Cal and Adam, and is Samuel Hamilton's friend. What is Lee's function in the novel (is it a stretch to describe him as an angel or semi-divine being who acts as helper to mankind)?
5. Samuel Hamilton is seen as a visionary in the novel. Is it a stretch to see him as a kind of prophet to continue the Biblical creation myth?
6. Apart from the questions about the Biblical creation myth, does the novel portray the development of the West in an effective manner?