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UNMASKING THE MONSTER: CATHY AMES IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *EAST OF EDEN*

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Department of Literature

By

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Under the mentorship of Joe Pellegrino

ABSTRACT

Critics have considered Cathy Ames, the heinous villain of *East of Eden*, to be John Steinbeck's most complicated character. Although she is at times truly despicable, readers are prejudiced against her before she is even introduced by the narrator, who couches her entire existence as something monstrous and withholds information that might garner her any sympathy until her literal hour of death. Through a study of both Steinbeck's narrative techniques and his letters to his editor about her, we can see that she may not be as villainous as she is presented to be, but she is most certainly Steinbeck's most fully realized—and fully human—creation.

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Unmasking the Monster: Cathy Ames in John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*

John Steinbeck was an American author and Nobel Prize in Literature winner. He was awarded the Nobel for his “realistic and imaginative writings, combining as they do sympathetic humor and keen social perception.” He authored a total of thirty-three novels that mainly focused on social and economic issues that plagued the American people.

John Steinbeck's *East of Eden (EoE)*, a work that he considered to be his masterpiece, has been both confusing and unsettling to critics and readers alike. Although Steinbeck himself thought of it as the culmination of everything he was trying to say in his oeuvre, those who had come to expect socially conscious novels exploring the plight of the underclasses saw this novel as quite out of character for the Nobel-winning author. Instead of a tightly-constructed work where characters are practically archetypes, *EoE* offers a sprawling multi-generational meditation on a matter that Steinbeck considered to be the fundamental moral question of his time: the story of Cain and Abel. In it, Steinbeck "celebrates the power of human beings to determine their own destiny through the heroic exercise of free will" (McCright 1). Steinbeck considered that family legacies are not just generational wealth or social status, but a sense of morality, or lack of it, as well. The novel is populated with characters who are strongly individuated, as they are products of both their unique histories and their personal choices. Thus, their actions are, at times, horrific and, at times, angelic.

Before the release of *EoE*, Steinbeck was generally considered a naturalist. He received high praise from critics for his earlier novels like *Grapes of Wrath* and *Mice and*

Men. The commentary provided in both novels is very straightforward and occasionally preachy. The differences between right and wrong are very distinguishable, making it easy to pick a clear protagonist and antagonist. Steinbeck became known and admired for his novels and their signature naturalism.

But once *EoE* was published, critics had a much different view of Steinbeck and his writing. The author received a lot of criticism for what he believed to be his best work. Some critics have gone as far as to label the novel as “anti-naturalistic” because of its use of the Old Testament and the concept of *timshel*. The once righteous commentary that Steinbeck provided in his earlier novels is replaced with a much more brutal depiction of human nature. The majority of the criticism resolving this body of work has to do with Steinbeck’s harsh treatment and portrayal of the novel’s main antagonist, Cathy Ames.

In the corpus of Steinbeck criticism, many scholars have noted a multitude of contradictions posed within *EoE*, but by far the most convoluted aspect is the novel's portrayal of Cathy. In order to better understand her character and the mixed reception she receives, readers must inspect every layer of Steinbeck’s novel and his personal letters regarding *EoE*.

When readers are first introduced to Cathy, the narrator provides a very detailed and stark description of her. Beginning in her early childhood, the narrator describes Cathy’s life using harsh language and provides a multitude of unnecessary anecdotes that can only be related back to Cathy herself. Although most of her life is described within one chapter, readers are intentionally led to view Cathy as a soulless monster.

The strongest factor influencing the reader's negative perception of Cathy is the narrator's deliberate prefacing and withholding of information. The narrator, who closely resembles the author himself, overtly exposes his own biases surrounding Cathy and others he deems "monsters." Along with the wicked deeds Cathy commits, there is an established sense of distaste for Cathy, particularly from the narrator.

Despite the overt information presented in the novel by the author and the narrator, there is an abundance of evidence that points to a very different side of Cathy. Unlike a majority of Steinbeck's works, the author documented his writing process as he completed his most ambitious novel, *EoE*. In *Journal of a Novel*, a collection of Steinbeck's letters to his editor, written while he was writing *EoE*, Steinbeck revealed his thought process and personal feelings regarding his characters. Within these, the author discloses a soft side for Cathy that is not shared by the narrator. Steinbeck provides reasons why Cathy behaves the way she does, and her importance in the narrative arc of the text, but also reveals his conflicted sentiments about her.

Although Cathy's portrayal has been met with harsh criticism since the novel's publication, there is an ample amount of complications within the novel itself that, upon inspection, reveal a different version of the *femme fatale*. Pitted against the narrator's possibly prejudicial presentation of her are also scenes that contain brutal assaults, standoffs, and a harrowing suicide. All of these combine to create a far more complicated, childlike character. Because of the complicated interactions between the plot of the novel, the characterization of Cathy, and the delayed revelation of information readers should have been privy to long before we are, it is difficult to judge or label Cathy's behavior fairly. But if we analyze these elements both individually and

juxtaposed against one another, we arrive at a far more nuanced, and far more human, understanding of Cathy Ames.

THE NARRATOR'S MANIPULATION

Throughout the novel, the narrator deliberately manipulates readers to feel a certain way about Cathy. The process of authors manipulating or “misleading” their readers is not a new strategy. In fact, reader manipulation is a narrative technique used by many writers to create engaging storylines. Through the use of a quasi-omniscient, third-person narrator (who strongly resembles Steinbeck himself), the author recounts the lives of the main characters, including Cathy. It is the narrator’s portrayal of Cathy and descriptions of her life events that reveal the extent to which readers' sympathies are manipulated.

Many of the chapters that focus on Cathy exclusively are tainted with a multitude of the narrator's generalities concerning human nature. These narrative asides typically hold little relevance to the actual storyline and only inform the reader of the narrator’s own preconceptions. For instance, before the reader is introduced to Cathy’s character in chapter eight, the narrator spends several paragraphs talking about the existence of monsters. These culminate in his statement just before he introduces Cathy: “I believe there are monsters born in the world to human parents” (71). This particular label of “monster” follows Cathy throughout the novel, as he repeatedly refers to her as one. The inclusion of claims such as these, from a supposedly dispassionate narrator, hinders the reader’s ability to examine Cathy and her actions objectively.

The narrator uses contemptuous diction when describing Cathy and the effect she has on others. The harsh language used is an intentional choice made by the narrator in order to influence readers. For example, two pages into the chapter that introduces her, the narrator states, “There was a time when a girl like Cathy would have been called possessed by the devil. She would have been exorcized to cast out the evil spirit, and if many trials did not work, she would have been burned as a witch for the good of the community” (72). This information is obviously not factual or relevant to her life story, but the narrator deliberately includes it within his description of her character, evoking prejudicial responses from readers.

As the novel progresses, discrepancies in narration become indisputable. It is evident that the narrator favors certain characters more than others. Readers see the internal monologues of those characters, and thus can more readily understand their motivations. But Cathy's internal monologue is withheld from readers until an hour before her death. Without access to her inner monologue and ignorant of her intentions, readers are left with only the narrator’s personal sentiments towards Cathy. Due to this voyeuristic narration, readers are not given Cathy’s honest, internal take on situations, and are left with the narrator as their sole source of information about her. Even when Cathy’s character is absent from hundreds of pages, the immoral description of her**,** provided by the narrator, follows her until her very last appearance. Because of the narrator’s choice of descriptors, voyeuristic style of narrating Cathy, and deliberate silence about her inner life, readers unknowingly adopt his stance on Cathy, and see her as a monstrous figure.

The narrator's initial characterization of Cathy as a monster since birth "with a malformed soul" lingers over the text and can be felt in each subsequent scene. Some of Cathy's actions are reprehensible, to say the least, but to label her as a "monster" is noteworthy. The simple question becomes: What exactly makes Cathy so monstrous? According to Claire Warnick, "Cathy represents the specific cultural fears accompanying the masculinity crisis in post-World War II America" (4). As a woman who openly rejected her role as a mother and wife, nothing could be more terrifying to the American man than Cathy Ames. Instead of relinquishing her womanly and sexual autonomy to her husband, Cathy took direct control of these attributes, and used them to get the things she wanted in life. Warnick argues, "Cathy's character links those fears about sexuality and power that have helped structure the trajectory of Western culture in general to specific mid-century American cultural facts about gender and the family" (5). Regardless of whether Steinbeck truly created Cathy to serve as a direct reflection of Western men's nightmares or not, Cathy's characterization as a monstrous woman still looms over the entirety of the text.

Upon narratorial description, Cathy appears vain, unwarranted in her behavior, and at times, two-dimensional, despite the severity of her actions. However, as readers learn in her final pages, the narrator omitted several pivotal details necessary to understand Cathy. When readers do ultimately become aware of the severity of Cathy's troubled past and its effect on her character, it comes about five hundred pages too late for genuine sympathy to be garnered for her. Had readers known the *real* Cathy, they would have had a harder time despising her, which would have directly foiled the narrator's meticulous plan. With this scheme in mind, the narrator successfully

manipulates readers into disliking Cathy, despite the inclusion of last-minute details that would have otherwise aroused compassion among readers.

CATHY THROUGHOUT THE TEXT

In chapter eight, the narrator goes into depth about Cathy's convoluted past and provides an overwhelming amount of irrelevant asides that further demonize her character. Within this life summary, the narrator recounts her upbringing but fails to include her personal accounts of events or her unspoken emotions. This chapter, on its own, paints a vivid picture of a young woman that lacks compassion or morals, and is thus deserving of her tragic fate.

Cathy Ames grew up an only child on a small farm in Connecticut. As a young girl, she possessed an otherworldliness that "made people uneasy but not so that they wanted to go away from her" (72). Cathy's ability to captivate the attention of others made it easy for her to get the things she wanted. The key difference between Cathy and everyone else is her insistence on remaining different. In her childhood, Cathy "never conformed in dress or conduct. She wore whatever she wanted to." (73). This assertion to remain uniquely herself is continuously reflected in her unimaginable, yet characteristic behavior.

Although the narrator describes her as "having the face of innocence," Cathy was a habitual liar. But she did not lie like other children did, instead her lies were carefully fabricated devices used to "escape punishment, work, or responsibility, and they were used for profit" (73). Endowed with the ability to convincingly deceive others at any

given moment, Cathy consistently spun webs of lies that entangled the lives of those around her.

Cathy's own parents were unsure of their daughter's true nature. Her mother ignored her strange behavior because she had only Cathy as a frame of reference, and thus believed that all children acted that way. Cathy's father, on the other hand, "was unsure about his daughter but he could not have said why" (74). Despite her father's unspoken concern, Cathy went most of her childhood unchecked.

Cathy learned early that sexuality, "with all its attendant yearnings and pains, jealousies and taboos, is the most disturbing impulse humans have" (74). She found that "by manipulation and use of this one part of people she could gain and keep power over nearly anyone" (74). So she began to manipulate others, particularly men, by using their sexual impulses against them. Her own sexuality was a tool to be used, because she did not have the "blind helplessness" of those who could not control their desires, and, "indeed felt a contempt for those who did" (74).

The narrator pays great attention to an early incident involving Cathy's power to both dissemble and manipulate men that happened when she was just ten years old. According to him, Cathy enticed two older neighborhood boys into her barn, where she asked them to strip her naked, and then tie her wrists together. When Cathy's mother stumbled upon this scene, the boys ran off, and Cathy put on the trappings of trauma. She refused to speak for quite a long time, and when she did eventually speak again, she did not discuss the incident. When pressed, her "eyes widened until the whites showed all around and her breathing stopped and her body grew rigid and her cheeks reddened from holding her breath" (76). The boys claimed that the whole thing was Cathy's idea, from

the rope to the five cents they each paid her. Despite their explanation, both boys earn harsh whippings and a stint in a house of correction. Although she was the perpetrator, Cathy, ever the picture of innocence, appeared to be a victim.

As she matured, “Cathy grew more lovely all the time” (78). She had beautiful blond hair and “wide-set, modest, and yet promising eyes” (78). Obviously, her tools were sharpened, and she was not afraid to use them. Once she was in high school, her father had his suspicions confirmed. When Cathy's Latin teacher, “wild and crazy-looking James Grew,” banged on the Ames family's door late one night, claiming frantically, “I’ve got to see you. I’ve got to see you alone,” (78-79) and “I can’t wait. I can’t wait," a confused Mr. Ames sent him home. But the next morning the man is found in front of the altar at church with “the whole top of his head was blown off” (79). Although it is not explicitly stated, it is same to assume that these two were previously in a grossly inappropriate relationship, even though “he was never seen with Cathy and no relationship was even suspected” (78).

Cathy later claims that she "laughed all night" (319) at the sight of Grew’s pitiful state. In front of her parents, Cathy feigned innocence, and explained away his odd behavior by covering her part in their relationship with a well-crafted story about how Mr. Grew "was in some kind of trouble in Boston” (80). The narrator informs us that this is not the first time she has drawn others into compromising positions while maintaining her own facade: “That was Cathy’s method. Before the next day was out everybody in town knew that James Grew had been in trouble in Boston and no one could possibly imagine that Cathy had planted that story” (80). So far, Cathy’s ruthless, deceitful

behavior seems to warrant her harsh characterization, which further minimizes reader's compassion towards her.

When Cathy turned sixteen, her mother found her reading the classic children's novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. When Mrs. Ames attempted to take the book from her, claiming that she was "too big" for it, Cathy responded, 'I can get to be so little you can't even see me" (81). Cathy identified with the fictional character of Alice because of her ability to imitate human emotions without really having them (what contemporary psychologists would call "Antisocial Personality Disorder," or psychopathology). The mention of Cathy's interest in this book, at the time, appears miniscule, but as readers learn hundreds of pages later, it sits at the heart of who she truly is.

In response to Cathy's strange statement, Mrs. Ames threatened her daughter with a talk from her father. Later that evening, Mr. Ames returns home from the tannery and has a talk with Cathy. He reminded her of "her duty, her obligation, her natural love of her parents" (82). Upon realizing she was not listening, Mr. Ames threatened her, which earned a small smile and direct eye contact from his daughter. Looking away, Mr. Ames vaguely threatens to whip Cathy if she continues to be disobedient, but finishes his lecture "on a note of weakness" when he asks his daughter to promise to attend school the next morning and stop her foolishness. Cathy, with an expressionless face, replied, "All right" (82).

The very next morning, Cathy was gone. Her bedroom, wiped clean and devoid of photos or mementos, "had no Cathy imprint" (80). Mr. Ames quickly set off to find his daughter and returned hours later with her by his side. That night, for the first time, Mr. Ames whipped Cathy. At first he hesitated and the "blows were tentative and timid, but

when she did not cry he slashed at her sides and shoulders" (82). Cathy quickly caught onto her father's pattern, and when she cried out, whimpered and begged, she was rewarded with the blows instantly becoming lighter. Once he was finished, Mr. Ames made her promise to never do it again and to not forget who he was. Through forced sobs and with dry eyes, Cathy responded, "I won't forget" (83). The lack of emotion described on Cathy's face, along with other unappealing labels attached to her by the narrator, paints an image of an unfeeling, unaffected young woman incapable of pain.

For a while, it appeared Cathy had learned her lesson. For example, "In the weeks that followed she helped her mother in the kitchen and offered to help more than was needed" (83). She expressed real concern and attentiveness towards her parents and their wishes, which led Mr. Ames to believe that the whipping of his daughter "kind of opened her up" (83). This new attitude had extended into her school life as well, prompting her to show renewed initiative in her studies and inquire about examinations for her teaching certificate.

Cathy's intellect didn't stop there, and she soon became invested in learning more about her father's business. Her parents basked in their daughter's new light and chalked it up to unconscious wisdom, only keen to parents. As Cathy's behavior radically improved, so did her looks: "It was true that Cathy glowed. The childlike smile was constantly on her lips while she went about her preparations. She had all the time in the world" (84). Despite the appearance and behavior of an angel, the narrator creates a sense of ambiguity and mistrust towards Cathy.

Like any master manipulator, Cathy was simply biding her time. One day, when Cathy had the whole house to herself, she set her plan in motion. Once alone, she

“worked quickly but without hurry” (85). Covering her clothes with an apron, Cathy chopped the head off of a young hen and drained its blood into a jelly jar she hides under the basement steps. After burning the evidence, Cathy walked “gaily toward the center of town where the bank was. And she was so fresh and pretty that people walking turned and looked after her when she had passed” (85). As one of the first mentions of Cathy expressing joy, it serves as stark contrast to the horrific scene that follows and a direct reflection of her mentality.

At three o’clock the next morning, the Ames residence was engulfed in flames, and by sunrise, the entire town was “tight-packed about the smoking black pile” (86). Cathy murdered her parents by setting fire to her childhood home and ran away. The chief of volunteers, while examining the rummage, made a shocking discovery. Signs of a struggle are identified in the carriage house when a shattered carriage, scraped marks in the dust, and blood on the floor are found. Although this incident is initially met with fear from the townspeople, it is soon forgotten. Within a month, people stopped wanting someone hanged for the crime, and by the second month, people realized that there was no real evidence pointed towards anyone. Besides, without her body, no one could prove anything, even if they suspected Cathy was dead.

It is not clear how Cathy heard about Mr. Edwards or his business. He is described as a successful “whoremaster” who operated his affairs “in an orderly and unemotional way” (89). Their first meeting shocked and unsettled Mr. Edwards, who “never mixed his professional life with his private pleasures” (91). He was immediately taken with the woman who called herself “Catherine Amesbury." By the end of their conversation, Cathy had successfully passed herself off as an orphan, looking for a way

to pay off her father's debt. Despite Mr. Edward's unwavering rule to never trust the things his girls told him, he was smitten with the version of the girl he saw before him. Similar to the manner in which Cathy has always conducted herself, she uses her looks and sexuality to get her way.

Cathy quickly entranced Mr. Edwards and became his own personal mistress. Even though she was provided a home and lavish lifestyle, she constantly toyed with her benefactor's emotions. Purposely torturing him, Cathy stroked Mr. Edwards' jealousy as a means to remain in control of his reactions and, therefore, in control of him. Eventually, Mr. Edwards becomes suspicious of Cathy's behavior and discovers the truth about her family's house fire. He then forces Cathy to accompany him to Connecticut, where he brutally beats Cathy to a pulp, believing she is dead, and leaves her on a dirt road.

Cathy, left barely breathing, crawls her way to the nearest home to ask for help. She comes upon the Trask property where she is nursed back to health by Adam Trask. He quickly falls in love with her and the two get married. For Cathy, the marriage was a form of temporary protection and devoid of any real feelings. Shortly after the two are wed, she drugs Adam and sleeps with his far more perceptive brother, Charles.

Charles, aware of Cathy's true nature, warns his brother of his new bride, but his pleas fall upon death ears. Adam moves himself and a reluctant Cathy to Salinas, California. There, to her dismay, Cathy discovers she is pregnant and, after a failed abortion attempt, gives birth to two twin boys. She stays bedridden for two weeks until she executes her escape. She shoots Adam for attempting to stop her and leaves her newborn twins with their physically and emotionally wounded father.

Cathy is often described as having serpent-like qualities. The narrator says, "Cathy moistened her lips with a little pointed tongue" (134). Her callous behavior resembles that of a deceitful snake. When Cathy orders Adam to tell Lee to leave the farm for a few hours, Lee notices the snake-like resemblance Cathy bears. The narrator continues, "Lee looked at Cathy standing in the doorway. He lowered his eyelids. 'Mebbee I come back late', he said, and he thought he saw two dark lines appear between her eyes and disappear" (199). The significance of snake imagery throughout Western culture is undeniable, as it often represents the destruction and chaos of the underworld. In the Book of Genesis, the snake, who triggered the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, is depicted as extremely cunning and mendacious in its actions. The same can be said for Cathy, who is repeatedly chronicled as a forbidding character at fault for most of the novel's problems.

If we view EoE through the lens of a biblical allegory, then Cathy's portrayal of the serpent fits perfectly. Along with occasional snake-like features being noted by the narrator and characters themselves, her behavior mirrors that of the evil, biblical serpent. Most scholars interpret the serpent as being Satan himself, but in some Abrahamic traditions, the snake actually represents sexual desire. In that sense, she truly resembles the snake because Cathy too uses her body and sex as a weapon to get the things that she wants. Along with the art of deception, Cathy has mastered seduction, and eventually combined the two in her profession as a prostitute.

Cathy, now going under the pseudonym, "Kate," then finds her way to Faye's Brothel. Kate becomes an integral part of the brothel's success and even becomes a daughter-figure to the brothel's owner, Faye. Mystified by Kate's beauty and aurora of

innocence, Faye bestows all of her earthly belongings to Kate in her will. Once again, Cathy uses her look of innocence and feigned helplessness to secure protection and control. When she becomes aware of her inheritance, Kate carries out a devious plan to kill Faye, takes ownership of the brothel, and transforms it into an institution known for its sexually depraved services.

According to critics, Steinbeck denotes two highly polarized perceptions of women: sexually desirable or pure and innocent. This type of character treatment regards women's desirability and purity as two mutually exclusive traits. According to Claude-Edmonde Magny, "the myth of the Virgin Whore," is embedded in Steinbeck's portrayal of female characters like Cathy. Although subjecting women to rigid societal norms and labeling their worth based on how well they fit into each category is not only sexist and dehumanizing, it is nevertheless an unfortunately common cultural phenomenon in the western world, and present in a majority of early twentieth century literature. This in no way excuses Steinbeck's outdated female characterization, but it perhaps mitigates our current condemnation of such writing, and situates that writing as a reflection of the culture and time in which it was constructed..

Throughout most of the novel, Cathy deliberately passes herself off as an innocent woman in need of protection. She hides behind the guise of a madonna-like figure, but as she ages and her alcoholism progresses, the extent of her sexual perversions are revealed. Peter Lisca, the author of *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, notes Steinbeck's categorization of women by their occupation. He claimed that Steinbeck's female characters "seem compelled to choose between homemaking and whoredom. It is better to be a good whore than a bad wife, and better to be a good wife than a bad whore.

Perfection is attainable in either field” (Lisca 207). In *EoE*, these two distinct modes of women are purposefully included and act as foils to one another.

Liza Hamilton and Cathy are perfect examples of the direct contrast of female roles in society. Unlike the renowned madame, Liza has a deep devotion to her family and God. Liza, who is described as a small, devout Presbyterian, raised nine children with her husband, Samuel. She is regarded as a noble, honest woman who, despite the hardship she faced, was deserving of love and a spot in God's righteous kingdom. This image of Liza stands in direct opposition to the way Cathy is presented. The latter is repeatedly described using dehumanizing language and biblical allusions that suggest a damned existence, while Liza remains unscathed and respected by the narrator.

After several years, Adam visits Kate at her brothel. He is unfazed by her cruel words and confession of their son’s true parentage. This only enrages Cathy, who is used to receiving her intended reactions from others. Cal, in an attempt to get back at his brother, brings Aron to Kate’s brothel. Hoping to crush his brother’s facade of their absent mother, Cal cruelly exposes Kate’s occupation (and true nature) Aron. Although Kate initially laughs at Aron’s horrified reaction alongside Cal, she is irrevocably haunted by the exchange.

Cathy begins to exhibit growing amounts of paranoia as she contemplates her life. Fearing that the truth surrounding Faye’s death will come to light, she covers her tracks with lies and bribes. Despite her attempts, the meeting with her son Aron, in particular, hangs over her. Overwhelmed with emotion, Cathy was “cold and desolate, alone and desolate” (549). Resigning to carry out the rest of her days with her “friend, Alice, Cathy commits suicide and leaves all of her worldly possessions to her son, Aron.

The era in which this book was written is significant in relation to Cathy's overall characterization. *EoE* was composed during a patriarchal, post-WWII climate that subjugated women into strict, subordinate roles. Cathy's rejection of motherhood and wifely duties mark her as a direct antithesis of the idealized 20th-century American woman, more specifically the role of mothers and wives (Cologone- Brookes 189-190). Cathy's behavior, however unhinged it may appear, aligns with the characterization of a dissatisfied woman bent on rebelling against societal expectations.

Steinbeck's portrayal of Cathy's rebellious behavior is regarded differently by critics. Some critics view Steinbeck's portrayal of Cathy as a direct commentary on the societal expectations placed on women. Danielle Woods states, "[Steinbeck] further argues that, in this time of chaos, changes should be welcomed as life continues, and that socially constructed roles that once seemed beautiful and virtuous, such as the domestic roles of women, are no longer satisfying to women and should not be forced on them" (8). With this in mind, Cathy's decision-making does not seem all that unwarranted. If she were really acting in objection to societal norms, then the heinous things she did were just a reaction to the strict, patriarchal society she lived in.

Although some critics are able to reason away some of Steinbeck's literary choices, there is still an overwhelming amount of criticism regarding Steinbeck's limited view of women, which has earned the author a reputation as a misogynist. One critic who promulgates this view is Magny, who notes that the women in Steinbeck's novels play subservient roles and that the themes of novels like *EoE* are "the expulsion of [the] woman from the true human community" (217). It takes little more than a glance at the chapter where Cathy is introduced to confirm such an understanding. However, such a

glib conception of both this text and this character would seriously undervalue both Steinbeck's abilities and the complications he incorporates into his characterization of Cathy. She is often considered to be the most fully realized and most complex character in his entire oeuvre.

JOURNAL OF A NOVEL

While writing this novel, Steinbeck composed a series of letters to his friend and editor, Pascal Covici, and they were collected into a volume titled, *Journal of a Novel*. These letters document Steinbeck's activities and thought process as he wrote his longest novel. According to the letters, Steinbeck's actual perception of Cathy is quite different from the way she is regarded by other characters in the novel and by the narrator himself. Unlike the unforgiving descriptions the narrator assigns Cathy, in Steinbeck's letters, she is regarded with fascination, and he often refers to her as his "dear Cathy."

About two months into their correspondence (which took place over nine months in 1951), Steinbeck finally addresses his most complex character. He wrote, "This is a woman and you must know her; know her completely because she is a tremendously powerful force in the book. And her name is Catherine or Cathy" (*JN*, March 26). This statement demonstrates that Steinbeck sees Cathy as a central figure, perhaps the central figure, in the text. Some critics go as far as to speculate that Cathy herself was inspired by the women in Steinbeck's life. According to Thomas Fensch, Cathy is based on "the worst perceived faults of his first and second wives." (5). While this can neither be confirmed or denied, Steinbeck's letters to his editor do reveal some truth to critics' claims. Steinbeck explained, "By the way, Cathy had a curious kind of skin—very

strange kind of a glow. She is a fascinating and horrible person to me. But there are plenty like her. That I know" (*JN*, March 30). And while this is referring to an actual person who both he and Pascal know, it is also an admonition to the reader that in order to understand this text, the reader must comprehend Cathy.

In regard to the vast amount of descriptions the narrator provides regarding Cathy's nature, Steinbeck wrote, "I have Cathy Ames to present. She is at once a complex and a simple character. It is the custom nowadays in writing to tell nothing about a character but to let him emerge gradually through the story and the dialogue. This is what you might even call the modern fashionable method" (*JN*, March 29). But Steinbeck is not setting out to be fashionable. He describes Cathy in great detail, through multiple paragraphs, before readers ever see her in the novel. By including this extended description, in the voice of the narrator, Steinbeck ensures that readers will, upon first encountering her, already have a pre-formed set of ideas about her character. He continued, "Using my method, which is neither new nor old-fashioned, I can tell everything I can about a character, but not only that, I can analyse and even say what I think about the character." Steinbeck then added, "Then if that person also comes through in the action and dialogue, one is pretty far ahead. I am not trying to fool my reader…" (*JN*, March 29). So, Steinbeck proposes to use a three-pronged approach in writing about Cathy: he leads with description and analysis of her, and that initial move is reinforced when readers see it being manifested in both her words and her actions.

In another letter, Steinbeck fleshes out one of Cathy's relationships, but admits that, despite her actions, there is something alluring about her. He is just unable to specify what that is: "Why Adam Trask should have fallen in love with her is anybody's guess

but I think it was because he himself was trained to operate best under a harsh master and simply transferred that to a tough mistress" (*JN*, March 27). For Adam, Cathy is what he has been conditioned to think that he deserves. This detail is not made overtly obvious through any particular incident in the novel, but it is Steinbeck's vision of the totality of Adam's upbringing and life experiences before he met Cathy. Cathy's role as a "tough mistress" is also what readers have been conditioned to expect from her, given the way she has been characterized from her first description by the narrator.

Although the narrator and Steinbeck himself seem to contradict each other at times, they both agree that Cathy is a monstrous figure. In his letters, Steinbeck writes, "Cathy Ames is a monster—don't think they do not exist. If one can be born with a twisted and deformed face or body, one can surely also come into the world with a malformed soul" (*JN*, March 28). Here, he clearly states her abominable condition and even goes so far as to defend her thinking. He explains, "There is one thing I don't think anyone has ever set down although it is true—to a monster, everyone else is a monster. This I am going into at some length" (*JN*, March 28). This explanation is useful in terms of understanding Cathy's words and actions. Although the things she has done seem undeniably cruel, we, as readers, are not supposed to understand her because we lack her monstrous outlook on life. Therefore, readers are left confused and unable to identify with a figure who was never meant to be understood.

In his letters, Steinbeck does not try to explain or excuse Cathy's status as a monster, but instead states that her monstrous condition is innate. Nikki Marie Garcia offers one way of understanding Cathy's lack of congenial capabilities by stating: "The narrator seems to be alluding to Cathy's refusal of domesticity. She lacks the tendency to

be maternal, nurturing, and loving, therefore leaving a 'shell' of a woman with her own desire for self-preservation and the power of 'using her difference, to make a painful and bewildering stir in her world'" (25). Although this offers some reasoning as to why Cathy behaves the way she does, it does not account for the vile things she did prior to becoming a wife and mother, thus leaving the question of the validity of Cathy's monstrous label unanswered.

Well before the novel's publication, Steinbeck was aware of the reaction Cathy would generate amongst audiences. In a journal entry, he wrote, "Cathy is going to worry a lot of children and a lot of parents about their children, but I have been perfectly honest about her and I certainly have her prototype" (*JN*, April 2). Despite this, Steinbeck continued with his inclusion of Cathy, determined to be as frank as possible in his portrayal of her. He even explains his own reasoning behind Cathy's importance in the book: "Cathy is important for two reasons. If she were simply a monster, that would not bring her in. But since she had the most powerful impact on Adam and transmitted her blood to her sons and influenced the generations—she certainly belongs in this book and with some time given to her" (*JN*, March 28). With Steinbeck's statement in mind, it is safe to assume that he viewed Cathy as something much larger than just a heinous female villain. To the author, Cathy was one of the novel's most fundamental characters deserving of numerous page descriptions and plot points that furthered the trajectory of the story.

As one of American literature's most heinous female characters, critics have argued for decades about what makes Cathy so terrifying. According to Warnick, "Although the description of Cathy in the text connects her to a long tradition of female

monsters, including Lilith and the Siren, Steinbeck's characterization of the monstrous woman focuses on specific mid-century American cultural fears" (3). Steinbeck's contemporary male readers would have been the most offended, and even repulsed, by Cathy's behavior. Her unwillingness to conform to the roles of an American wife and mother terrified not only readers but also Steinbeck himself. In his letters, he detailed his discomfort and exhaustion as he wrote some of her most harrowing chapters. Nonetheless, the fear that Cathy would have inspired in twentieth century men like Steinbeck himself can easily be roused in modern day readers as well.

But Steinbeck, as the narrator, eventually reconsiders his portrayal of Cathy. It is as if it takes him one third of the book to see what Steinbeck, the author, had known all along: that Cathy is moved by some inner sense of lack, or some unfulfilled desire, that justifies her actions to herself. The narrator writes, "When I said Cathy was a monster, it seemed to me that it was so. Now I have bent close with a glass over the small print of her and reread the footnotes, and I wonder if it was true" (182). Since we can never know anyone's motives, (and since there is no such thing as a pure motive, even for acts that are good), the narrator wants to give Cathy the benefit of the doubt: "The trouble is that since we cannot know what she wanted, we will never know whether or not she got it" (182). While the focus of this sentence is on the results of her actions, the setup for that conclusion, that we cannot know what it was that she desired in life, is the hinge on which our understanding of Cathy swings.

A large component of this story is Steinbeck's adamant inclusion of the concept of *timshel*. According to Steinbeck, the Hebrew translation of this word in Genesis grants man the ability to choose his own fate. In his letters, he wrote, "Your [Covici] new

translation of the story has one most important change… 'Thou mayest rule over it'… Here is individual responsibility and the invention of conscience. You can if you will but it is up to" (*JN*, June 21). If this was Steinbeck's thinking as he wrote *EoE*, then Cathy's decision to act as sinisterly as she does can be easily chalked up to the term *timshel*. In the same manner in which people decide to commit acts of goodness, they can also choose to act cruelly because it is their choice, therefore, their will. This concept, although it appears many times throughout the novel, seems to exclude Cathy. When in reality, she is the walking embodiment of personal will power because she constantly serves her own self interest and exerts her own individual will.

Cathy clearly exhibits a variety of psychopathic tendencies as well as basic lack of empathy for others. The narrator states, "She [Cathy] had the inhumane attribute of abandoning what she could not get and of waiting for what she could get. These two gifts gave her great advantages" (157). These same "gifts" came in handy when Cathy carried out her diabolical plan of killing Faye taking control of the brothel. After completing this section, Steinbeck wrote to his editor, "Now. There's the insert done and it went three hand-written pages. It is horrible but it brings Kate out in the open- the only time it will ever happen" (*JN*, Jan. 29). Steinbeck himself recognized the cruel manner in which Cathy conducted this ritual, but instead of ridiculing her, he acknowledges her predictable nature: "But I think now the sequence is matured so that there will be no surprise at what she does. It is all in and understandable. And psychiatrically very accurate I might say" (*JN* 96). With this loosely defined psychological condition in mind, it makes characterizing Cathy that much more difficult. Since the narrator did not acknowledge

this aspect of Cathy's condition, readers are unaware of her possible inability to feel empathy towards others, thus making her character appear all the more monstrous.

Despite the information presented in the letters, it remains unclear why exactly Steinbeck (as expressed in his letters) and the narrator differ in their views of Cathy. The narrator, on one hand, is repeatedly unforgiving in his descriptions of Cathy, while Steinbeck acknowledges Cathy's intricate past and inconceivable "condition" within the novel. Although these letters do not provide any new, overt information about the plot, they reveal the stark difference in perceptions regarding Cathy by these two figures, meaning there is a purposeful way in which Cathy is portrayed in both the novel and the letters.

Few novels are written by American greats like John Steinbeck, and even fewer have accompanying letters that describe the author's thought process and personal views of their characters. Even though these letters reveal some of Steinbeck's personal thoughts surrounding Cathy and her role in the book, they do not provide any concrete explanations that can be backed up by the text. These letters, though, reveal the extent to which Steinbeck favored Cathy and how much her character meant to the overarching storyline. While they reveal a bit of Steinbeck's authorial intent, his letters leave readers with many unanswered questions: Why exactly does Cathy act in this way? How come the narrator second guesses his stance on Cathy so late in the novel? And what is the purpose of hating a character we have no chance of remotely understanding?

IF WE JUST CONSIDER THESE THINGS…

If we just consider these things, her chapter summary and overall characterization, the use of narrator manipulation, and information available in Steinbeck's personal letters, then the notion of Cathy being a monster does not seem far off. Although Steinbeck's letters reveal his speculations regarding Cathy's psychopathy, there is no explicit label or diagnosis given to her that would absolve her of her crimes. Without this explanation, Cathy's actions come across unjustified and not relatable. Therefore, she effectively earns the hatred of readers and her monstrous label.

As a character who has committed a multitude of atrocities without so much as an apology or explanation, Cathy appears undeserving of sympathy or forgiveness, two things she is not granted by the narrator. However, despite the information presented by the narrator and Steinbeck himself, there are a few instances in the novel where there are obvious cracks in Cathy's facade. These key scenes, with or without the help of narrative manipulation, reveal the extent of the narrator's manipulation and show a different side of Cathy, a side readers are not privy to for a majority of the novel. The inclusion of such scenes reveals the extent to which she is dehumanized by the narrator, and troubling details about her childhood and psyche that would otherwise explain her behavior.

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Cathy, in comparison to the other main characters in the novel, receives a harsher assessment from the narrator. But there are several incidents within the text that might cause a reader to wonder at the narrator's lack of sympathy for her. Whatever the reason, two significant physical encounters are downplayed by the narrator, and one crucial bit of

information about Cathy in her childhood is deliberately withheld from readers until the moment of her death. While there is no definitive way to address these anomalies, readers can only see this denigration and temporal distortion as manifestations of the narrator's prejudice. He does not want us to have any sympathy for this woman he considers to be a monster, but he is committed to telling the truth, no matter how late in the game he presents it.

By the time Cathy is beaten nearly to death by her "benefactor," Mr. Edwards, readers are convinced that she is merely getting what she deserves. When faced with her own powerlessness, readers relish seeing her rising frustration and impotence, and cringe as she resorts to violence. Finally, readers must reframe their entire understanding of her life as the narrator reveals her fragility and fear, both with her from her childhood, only when she is on death's doorstep. These withholdings are the ultimate examples of the narrator's manipulation of our feelings toward her.

MR. EDWARDS

When Cathy was ferociously beaten by her ex-lover, Mr. Edwards, the narrator seems to recount the event rather matter-of-factly. He writes, “Catherine did her best not to fall into panic. She tried to duck his fists or at least to make them ineffective, but at last fear overcame her and she tried to run (97). There is not a sense of care nor necessity on the narrator’s part to include Cathy’s thoughts or feelings. Although Cathy’s inability to escape is not the narrator's own doing, he is responsible for the manner in which her savage beating is described and, therefore, regarded by readers.

The narrator continues, “He [Mr. Edwards] leaped at her and brought her down, and by then his fists were not enough. His frantic hand found a stone on the ground and his cold control was burst through with a red roaring wave” (97). With little regard to Cathy’s wellbeing or reactions, the narrator proceeds, “That he had not killed Catherine was an accident. Every blow was intended to crush her. She realized that her arm was broken and that she must find help if she wanted to live” (98). With nothing revealed but her instinctual will to survive, readers are, once again, robbed of Cathy’s perspective of the incident.

It is not until several chapters later that readers learn what becomes of Cathy. When she makes her way to the Trask house, the narrator uses dehumanizing language to further his nightmarish narrative of Cathy. As Cathy struggles to find refuge, the narrator says, “A dirty bundle of rags and mud was trying to worm *its* way up the steps” (109). To the narrator, she is not a victim of a vicious assault, but instead a non-human type creature deserving of the pronoun “it." With little thought given to Cathy’s mental or physical state, the narrator reduces her to a filthy, misshapen object, thus directing readers to see her the same way.

It appears the narrator’s sympathies extend to just about every character in the novel except for Cathy. When a similarly savage and unprovoked attack is described earlier in the novel, the narrator is far more compassionate towards that victim than he was towards Cathy. Early in the novel, Adam Trask is attacked by his younger brother, Charles. The narrator describes each brutal blow: “One fist lanced delicately to get the range, and then the bitter-frozen work- a hard blow in the stomach, and Adam’s hands dropped; then four punched to the head. Adam felt the bone and gristle of his nose

crunch" (31). But within this scene of domestic savagery, the narrator still humanizes Adam, therefore urging readers to sympathize with the young boy. He continues, "He raised his hands again and Charles drove at his heart. And all this time Adam looked at his brother as the condemned look hopelessly at the executioner" (30). Unlike in the description of Cathy's assault, the narrator grants Adam a sense of humanity. As Adam endures the violent rage of Charles, "he wondered how his brother felt, wondered whether now that his passion was chilling would feel panic or sorrow or sick conscience or nothing" (31). Through this emotional description, the narrator implies Adam's victimhood and status as a moral character. As we know, Cathy is not privileged to this same kind of depiction, despite her similar, unwarranted assault. The way the narrator sympathetically treats Adam further proves Cathy's unwarranted representation at the and leaves readers wondering: What other scenes did the narrator purposely include/omit information in order to push his view of Cathy onto readers?

Although the narrator's feelings towards Cathy are unclear and often contradictory, his portrayal of her accounts for the way audiences view her. Unlike the manner in which characters like Adam Trask or Sammuel Hamilton are depicted, Cathy's is devoid of sympathy or understanding. Because of the narrator's lack of an objective portrayal, readers are denied the same humanistic approach when reading about Cathy. Despite the severity of her actions, her physical and emotional wellbeing are disregarded after Mr. Edward's violent act, thus swindling readers of an opportunity to empathize with her. If given Cathy's account of this incident, including the bodily pain and the emotional trauma she endured, perhaps readers would have *slightly* understood why she continued to behave the way she did. Unfortunately, there are only a few occurrences that

disclose the inner workings of her mind, and even with these revelations, they only further complicate readers' understanding of Cathy.

THE ESCALATION WITH ADAM

After Cathy shot Adam and left him with their newborn twins, the two do not see each other for years until Adam shows up at her brothel one night. Their reunion is nothing short of disastrous, although it does expose readers to a different version of Cathy. After completing this chapter, Steinbeck wrote in his letters: "There—that damnable chapter [25] is finished. But I think you can see why it was necessary. Maybe you understand Cathy a little better" (JN, July 6). Since Steinbeck explicitly states that this chapter could possibly help readers understand Cathy more clearly, then we must closely examine its contents.

Upon leaving Samuel Hamilton's funeral, something compels Adam Trask to seek out Cathy. When Cathy initially left Adam and their sons, Adam was grief stricken. It took him years to rebuild himself with the help of his servant, Lee, and Samuel Hamilton.

When he asks a bar patron if he knew "a place called Kate's" (312), the man is surprised by Adam's question and warns him against finding it. The man says, "Let Kate alone. That's not good for you" (312). Cathy (who has shortened and masculinized her name to "Kate") runs a brothel that has a deplorable reputation among the locals, yet it —and she—is surrounded by an aura of mystery. Based on the man's distasteful reaction, it's safe to assume that, even for a whorehouse, "Kate's place" offered a number of unconscionable, sexually depraved services.

Despite the warning given to him, Adam is determined to seek out Kate's place. When he finds it, he is met at the front door by a young woman named Eva. The characterization used for this young woman is oddly similar to Cathy's. For instance, when Adam walks inside and the two engage in small chat, he makes animalistic comparisons. The narrator says, "Adam peered at the girl before him… Her face was sharp- pretty and sharp. He tried to think of what animal, what night prowler, she reminded him" (313). Along with sharp facial features, Eva and Cathy are described as bearing resemblance to predatory animals.

He eventually gets to the point of his visit and requests to see Kate. Eva claims that "Miss Kate" is busy, but she can take care of him instead. When he insists upon seeing Kate, Eva once again mirrors her madam: "The girl's voice took on the edge of a blade sharpened on a stone. 'You can't see her. She's busy. If you don't want a girl or something else you'd better go away" (313). It is not coincidental that Eva not only has the same bestial features, but also acts as coldly and as swiftly as Cathy does. This encounter, as short as it is, offers a taste of how Adam and Eva's reunion will pan out.

Eva eventually leaves to pass the message on to Miss Kate, and, for a moment, we are given what seems to be an intimate view of Kate's bedroom. Her bedroom, described as "a silken room," is filled with long silken drapes and almost everything is "apple green" (314). Her decorations are simple, impersonal, yet deliberate, similar to their owner. When the narrator finally acknowledges Kate's presence in her bedroom, the second observation he makes is about her appearance. After detailing the effects of her growing into middle age, he counters that, despite these signs of aging, "she was still pretty" (314). This statement, as shallow as it may seem, is essential to Cathy's character.

She uses her beauty to manipulate those around her, therefore the retainment of this attribute is central to her sense of power and control.

But as the narrator continues to describe her, he metonymizes her body, detailing various body parts and noting the effects of time upon each of them. He observes, “Her shoulders had become plump while her hands grew lean and wrinkled. . . . Her breasts were still tiny, but a padding of fat protruded from her stomach a little. Her hips were slender, but her legs and feet had thickened so that a bulge hung over her low shoes” (314). Understandably, she has aged in the last decade and a half, but the narrator makes it his mission to point out every detail of Kate’s mature figure. Attached to each backhanded compliment is a negative narrative assessment of her body.

Nevertheless, the narrator maintains that “still, she was pretty and neat” (314). As Kate slips pictures into manilla envelopes, Eva reluctantly knocks on the door. She tells Kate of the visitor and is initially shooed away until she mentions the name “Adam Trask." Eva, upon mentioning the man’s name, knew that “something had struck home” (315). Kate immediately jumps into action and orders Eva to sit down. When the girl failed to do so immediately, “Kate whipped one word at her. ‘Sit!’ Eva cringed and went to the big chair” (315). As Cathy begins to belittle Eva, the narrator fails to mention Cathy’s thoughts concerning Adam’s arrival. Instead, he notes the fear Cathy has instilled in her girls: “Then she moved so suddenly that Eva jumped and her lips quivered” (315). Despite Kate moving towards her desk and not Eva, the girl’s reaction reveals a pattern of panic when they interact.

Kate then bribes Eva with “a little white powder.” While dangling it in front of her, she orders her to inform Ralph to stay close enough to Kate’s door “to hear the bell

but not the voices," and then to fetch Adam (315-316). As she waited for his arrival, Kate prepared her revolver and hid it beneath a piece of paper on her desk. When Adam finally enters her room, the two simply stare at each other. The narrator describes her eyes as "cold and expressionless," while Adam is described as taking in every detail of her appearance. The narrator, once again, chooses to include Adam's observations, but omits Cathy's.

However, despite the lack of inner monologue, Cathy's unrest can be detected through her intense reactions, both verbal and physical. At this moment, Adam does not succumb to Cathy like he did in the past. Adam, sighing deeply and wanting "to shout with relief," was unmoved by the woman before him. Kate, on the other hand, was shaking and reaching for the piece of paper. After Kate asks what he wants, Adam responds, "Nothing now. I just wanted to see you" (316). As he sat down, Kate stopped shaking and she began to calm down.

As Kate relaxed, "her mouth smiled and her little teeth showed, the long canines sharp and white" (316). Similarly to Eva, Cathy appears animalistic to the narrator. As Cathy begins to belittle Adam and their relationship, she makes the mistake of assuming Adam's reactions. In their previous relationship, Cathy was always sure that Adam would submit to her will. When she claims she had expected Adam to visit but ultimately forgot about him, he responds, "I didn't forget about you. But now I can" (316). This type of response, and the similar ones that follow it, indicate Adam's growth and just how out of reach he is from Cathy and her tricks.

Being forgotten is not something that Cathy has ever been accustomed with. When she questions Adam's statement, he makes a nonchalant admission: "Now I see

you, I mean. You know, I guess it was Samuel said I'd never seen you and it's true. I remember your face but I had never seen it. Now I can forget it" (317). As a woman who has always had others, especially men, under her control, this statement certainly upset her. Cathy, unable to handle such a dismissal, began taunting him and when that did not work, she switched to sexual advances. The narrator says, "She changed her manner… 'If you feel alright about everything, maybe we could get together'" (317). Adam quickly declines her advances, which prompts Cathy to dig her claws in even deeper.

Unable to relinquish control to Adam and accept defeat, Cathy begins to mercilessly insult him. She taunts, "You were such a fool. Like a child. You didn't know what to do with yourself" (317). Despite her best efforts, Adam remains unfazed as the two share a glass of rum. She tries to get him to move closer to her, but he can not keep his eyes off of "her protruding stomach" (317). As Cathy catches on to Adam's gaze and lack of intimidation, she notices "a smile she had never seen" on him before.

Already inebriated by the alcohol, Cathy makes the mistake of saying: " I never drink it. It poisons me" (317). The last time Cathy drank alcohol in front of a man, her defenses fell and she ruthlessly insulted him; and then he ferociously assaulted her and left her for dead. As Adam smiled at her slip up, Cathy's rage began to boil over. Adam, continuing to show little emotion towards Cathy's harsh words, states that he will soon leave after finishing his drink. Immediately, "the biting alcohol burned in her throat and she felt a stirring in her that frightened her" (318). What follows are Cathy's numerous attempts to get a rise out of Adam and regain control.

After claiming that she's "not afraid of [Adam] or anyone else", Cathy defends herself the only way she knows how, by hurting others (318). She mentions the recently

departed Samuel Hamilton and tells Adam that she has always hated him. When that statement does not faze Adam, she then says, “I hated him. I would have killed him if I could” (318). Instead of reacting, Adam questions Cathy, to which she replies, “He looked- he looked into me” (318). When Cathy was first introduced to Samuel Hamilton earlier in the novel, the narrator notes the disdain she held for him and how Samuel, too, mistrusted her. This is the first time that Cathy admits that “being looked into” is what fuels her hatred.

Despite his recent passing, Cathy still mentions this in order to dig her metaphorical knife deeper into Adam’s chest. However, once again, his response is calm and unexpected. Adam responds, “Might have been good if I had looked into you” (319). This statement seems to push Cathy over the edge as she continues to sprawl insults towards an unmoved Adam: “You were a fool. I don’t hate you. You’re just a weak fool” (319). Her aspersions act as a shield, protecting Cathy from the one thing she knows will expose her: being looked into. On account of the fact that the last person who truly inspected her nearly beat her to death, Cathy is doing everything in her power to never be in that compromising position again.

As Cathy scrambled to regain control and “her tension built up, a warm calm settled on Adam” (319). For the first time, we see Adam delighting in Cathy’s vulnerable state. Cathy, in response to Adam’s smile, cries, “Sit there and grin. You think you’re free, don’t you? A few drinks and you think you’re a man! I could crook my little finger and you’d come back slobbering, crawling on your knees" (319). According to the narrator, Adam’s dispassionate response to Cathy’s words loosens her sense of power and causes her to abandon her “vixen carefulness” (319). Finally, readers’ suspensions

regarding Cathy's *femme fatale* act are confirmed. Her "vixen carefulness" which allowed her to seduce, lie, and, and blackmail men, is deserted, which implies that Cathy had been putting on this act for quite some time (319).

Adam, with a smile still on his face, continues to listen to Cathy's slander. She degrades him and mocks his weaknesses by claiming: "When I was hurt I needed you. But you were a slop… Take that ugly smirk off your face" (319). Then, as if he were in the mind of readers themselves, Adam ponders, "I wonder what it is that you hate so much" (319). Cathy's caution is relinquished as she replies, "It isn't hatred. It's contempt" (319). This revelation can be drawn back to Steinbeck's letters when he states that, to a monster, everyone else is a monster. As Cathy goes on to explain the phony nature of her own parents, she mentions James Grew's death and how, he too, was a hypocrite.

Her pessimistic statements are continuously met with questions, rather than hurt responses, until Cathy says, "That's what I hate, the liars, and they're all liars. That's what it is. I love to show them up. I love to rub their noses in their own nastiness" (319). Finally, Cathy gets the reaction she was hoping for when Adam refuses to believe that this is her worldview. She jumps from her bed to retrieve the brown envelopes that contain blackmail against some of her brothel's most distinguished clients. She brags, "Look there. That's a state senator. He thinks he's going to run for congress. Look at his fat stomach. He's got bubs like a woman. He likes whips. That streak there- that's a whip mark" (320). Adam is immediately disturbed by the images and replies, "I'm beginning to think you're a twisted human- or no human at all" (320). Cathy, in response, smiles and agrees with his suspensions. She claims, "Do you think I want to be human? Look at

those pictures! I'd rather be a dog than a human. But I'm not a dog. I'm smarter than humans. Nobody can hurt me" (321). According to Cathy, she would rather be a canine than continue being as hypothetical as the rest of the human race. Admissions like these reveal a more melancholy, suicidal side to Cathy that we do not see until her last appearance.

As her taunts grow more sinister, Adam comes to a conclusion that Cathy refuses to believe: "I know what you hate. You hate something in them you can't understand. You don't hate their evil. You hate the good in them you can't get at. I wonder what you want, what final thing" (321). This is the first time that Adam, or any other character in the novel, directly accuses Cathy of lacking an inherent goodness that other people naturally possess. She tries to shrug off his comment by mentioning her desire to kill Mr. Edwards. When Adam refuses to believe in her murderous desire, Cathy attempts, once again, to seduce him.

Promising to "teach" him, Cathy lays her hand on Adam's arm. In revulsion, he moves his arm when "he looked down at her hand and saw it wrinkled as pale as a monkey's paw" (322). This further infuriates Cathy, as she has always relied on her physical beauty to seduce men. In her last ditch effort to humiliate Adam, she mentions the possibility of her son's true parentage. She says, " Your sons? I am the mother, yes- but how do you know you are the father?" (322). To which Adam replies, "You are a devil. But do you think I could believe that of my brother?" (322). Despite this being the truth, Cathy's words are initially met with disbelief until Adam comes to the conclusion that "It wouldn't matter- even if it were true. It wouldn't matter at all" (322). Unsatisfied with Adam's lack of betrayal, Cathy tries, for the last time, to tempt him.

As she tried to take off Adam's coat, he "twisted her hands from his arms as though they were wire" (323). Although the narrator states that her vixen carefulness was abandoned moments earlier, Adam's numerous rejections destroyed what little of it Cathy had left. The narrator says, "Uncontrollable hatred shone in Kaye's eyes. She screamed, a long and shrill animal screech… 'The boots! Give him the boots!" (322). As Ralph, the house pimp, comes barging into the room, he strikes Adam. Cathy, unhappy with this short-lived act of revenge, replies coldly, "I said give him the boots. Break his face!" (322). Ralph hesitates as Adam remains on the floor, unmoving and unwilling to fight back.

Like never before, readers see Cathy throw a wild fit over Adam's unwillingness to bend to her will. She screams, "Adam, I hate you. I hate you now for the first time. I hate you! Adam, are you listening? I hate you!" (322). Nevertheless, Adam stands his ground by not stopping down to her level. He simply replies, "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all" (322). A dumbfounded Cathy stares at him as he gets up to leave. Ralph, still observing the encounter, asks Cathy if he should "give him the boots" now, to which Cathy ignores and continues to call after ex-husband. With Adam now gone, she stared at the door and "her eyes were desolate" (322).

This encounter reveals the extent of Cathy's demand for control and just how desperate she can get in order to maintain it. Adam's arrival initially terrified Cathy, who is no stranger to violent, vengeful men, but once she realized he posed no threat, she believed she was back in control. This assertion is effectively destroyed when Adam repeatedly refuses Cathy's sexual advances, questions her logic, and dismisses her cruel

remarks. Unable to cope with her powerlessness, Cathy resorts to escalating the severity of her words and seduction, and when that proves fruitless, she resorts to violence.

The vixen carefulness Cathy has spent a majority of the novel upholding is abandoned and readers come to realize that this is an intentional front used to get her way. The urgency in which Cathy redirected her attention from insulting Adam to trying to seduce him reveals the frantic state of Cathy's mind. Although readers are unaware of her thoughts during this scene, her actions speak much louder than her harsh words. Cathy relies on her cruelty in order to remain in control of situations because she fears powerlessness and exposure to those who can hurt her.

Despite the viciousness of her words and Cathy's adamant request for "the boots", she surprises both Adam and readers when she does not let Ralph continue the beating. Instead, Cathy calls after Adam and repeatedly insists that she hates him. Adam's nonchalant manner triggered far more than any other conflict she has faced thus far. To be so easily tossed aside enrages Cathy, who, until this point, has never faced such a snub before. Whether or not Cathy truly meant the things she said is unclear, but her vexation with Adam's reaction is significant in terms of her true character. The reunion between the two reveals Adam's growth, maturity, and distaste for Cathy, while her reaction discloses a desperate woman who can not bear to lose control.

If readers take Steinbeck's letters into consideration, then this chapter is far more significant than it initially seemed. He hoped that this chapter would help Pascal (and other readers) better understand Cathy. Although readers may not relate to her murderous actions and admissions of cruelty, they can relate to one thing: her desperation. Regardless of Cathy's wish to be a dog rather than a human, her reactions are as human

as they get. The frustration she experiences when she does not get her way is childlike as she repeatedly provokes Adam and eventually throws a full-blown temper tantrum. Even though the narrator would like readers to believe that she is an unemotional, unaffected woman, this scene proves otherwise. Cathy is no less affected by the words and actions of others than anyone else. In fact, it is revealed that she demands the control of others' reactions in order to remain in control of herself.

HER ONLY FRIEND: ALICE

Despite the multitude of descriptions the narrator provides, the narrator omits a very prominent part of Cathy's life: her psyche. Up until Cathy's last appearance in the novel, the audience is given very little information about her own psychological state or emotions. Every other time Cathy has committed atrocious acts, the narrator regarded her from a voyeuristic point of view. He stated her actions, included the emotional turmoil she caused on others, and of course, added his own sentiments as well.

We learn, just pages before her suicide, that Cathy held a deep fascination and kinship towards Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice's character fascinated Cathy because Alice does not face any real repercussions for her actions. Immersed in a world of fantastical creatures and possibilities, Alice is virtually free from the consequences of the real world, which is something that Cathy desperately wants.

As Cathy, now 'Kate' ever since she changed her name, makes the mortal decision to end her life, readers learn the depth of her obsession with *Alice in Wonderland.* This monumental aspect of her personality is excluded from her character description until the very end of her life. This particular scene discloses hidden character

traits and anxieties never before acknowledged by the narrator. We learn, in just a few pages, some of the inner workings of Cathy's mind. Including such personal, hidden information about Cathy is quite unusual for the narrator. For a majority of the novel, he is detached from Cathy. She is observed by the narrator, but never related to or emphasized with. We learn from Steinbeck's letters that he regards Cathy as a monster, yet he also acknowledges his (and other non-monstrous people's) inability to properly understand her. The incapacity to relate to and objectively view Cathy because of her monstrous condition hinders the narrator's access to Cathy's inner thoughts and feelings until her final moments.

When Cathy begins to unravel under the stress of yet another "threat" to her safety, the face of her hurt son, Aron, comes to mind. His reaction to seeing his brothel-owning mother for the first time triggers a core memory for Cathy. The narrator writes, "His face- hurt, bewildered, despairing- had brought it. Then she remembered" (548). Cathy's recognition of her son's reaction reminded her of her own childhood experiences: "She was a very small girl with a face as lovely and fresh as her son's face- a very small girl. Most of the time she knew she was smarter and prettier than anyone else. But now and then a lonely fear would fall upon her so that she seemed surrounded by a tree-tall forest of enemies" (548-549). Her own suffering, a concept not recognized up until this point, is revealed through her associations with Alice.

This is the first time in the novel that the narrator acknowledges this side to Cathy. He continues, "Then every thought and word and look was aimed to hurt her, and she had no place to hide. And she would cry in panic because there was no escape and sanctuary" (549). Those same looks Cathy felt were "aimed to hurt her" are assessed

differently in Cathy's introduction chapter (549). In chapter eight, the narrator goes into depth about Cathy's early childhood leading up to the murder of her parents. He writes, "Even as a child she had some quality that made people look at her, then look away, then look back at her, troubled at something foreign. Something looked out of her eyes, and was never there when one looked again" (72). The difference between how these looks are regarded reveals the stark difference in how Cathy is portrayed versus how she actually felt on the inside.

As Cathy further contemplates suicide and thinks back on her childhood, the narrator writes, "Then one day she was reading a book. She remembered the book-brown, with a silver title, and the cloth was broken and the boards thick. It was *Alice in Wonderland*." Although we learn of Cathy's interest in the childhood book earlier in the novel, this is the first time her interest in the book is expounded upon. The narrator continues, "She could see the drawings- Alice with long straight hair. But it was the bottle which said 'Drink me' that changed her life. Alice had taught her that" (549).

Through her association with Alice, we learn that Cathy's biggest concern has always been her safety from those who threatened her. The narrator explains, "When the forests of her enemies surrounded her she was prepared. In her pocket she had a bottle of sugar water and on its red-framed label she had written 'Drink me.' She would take a sip from the bottle and she would grow smaller and smaller. Let her enemies come for her then!" (549). Never before are readers told of Cathy's suicidal ideations and attachment for the fictitious story, but through this revelation, readers become more acquainted with her.

As we learn more about her childlike inclinations, the narrator refers to her as "Cathy" once again, bringing the audience full circle to her childhood name. Out of reach from those who meant to cause her harm, the narrator describes Cathy's desired vision of smallness: "Cathy would be under a leaf or looking out of an ant hole, laughing. They couldn't find her then. No door could close her out and no door could close her in. She could walk upright under a door" (549). This description of a helpless, terrified Cathy is unfamiliar to readers.

We are not told much of Cathy's relationships that don't have to do with manipulating and lying to men. However, we learn over the course of this scene that, to Cathy, Alice had been her only true friend. The narrator describes, "And always there was Alice to play with, Alice to love her and trust her. Alice was her friend, always waiting to welcome her to tinyness" (549). Cologne-Brookes further explains Cathy's sentiments for Alice: "Such observations read like a gloss on how Steinbeck's anti-heroine might see herself." Indeed, this scene acts as one of the few instances where readers see Cathy as she sees herself. Cologne-Brookes continues, "Perhaps to understand Cathy involves a realization that, since the world has indeed gone awry in her eyes, she has long ago decided of other people, 'Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!' She can be seen to have carried her own distorted version of Alice within her" (Cologne-Brookes 187). The mere mention of Alice providing comfort and company for Cathy is astronomical considering her antisocial behavior and vilified narration.

As she reminisces over her fondness for Alice and the company she provided, Cathy's own emotional wellbeing is mentioned: "All this so good- so good that it was almost worth while to be miserable" (549). Unsurprisingly, this is the book's first mention

of Cathy’s own unhappiness. The character who is perpetually referred to as a monster and has no problem lying to those around her is simultaneously capable of emotional torment, like everyone else.

As Cathy scrutinizes her situation, the narrator remarks, “But as good as it was, there was one more thing always held in reserve. It was her threat and her safety. She only had to drink the whole bottle and she would dwindle and disappear and cease to exist. And better than all, when she stopped being, she never would have been” (549). In Cathy’s mind, her death would act as a removal or erasure of her actions. To her, drinking from the bottle would release her from all the worry and fear she has been evading her entire life. The narrator goes as far as to call the vial “her darling safety” (549) that was always on hand in case Cathy needed it.

The narrator reveals that Cathy would take small sips of the liquid “so that she was a dot as small as the littlest gnat." Cathy’s tendency to romanticize her own death in situations of stress is excluded from previous chapters, including Cathy’s “sexual assault” and the beating she received from Mr. Edwards. But, as stated, “Cathy never had to drink all of ‘Drink me’ because she had Alice” (549). This denotes a sense of regularity to Cathy’s preoccupation with Alice and “Drink me." Information withheld until her last dying moment reveals that the narrator did not include essential aspects of Cathy’s life in her earlier summary description.

As she shakes her head, remembering the “cut-off little girl," Cathy wonders “why she had forgotten that wonderful trick” (549). It appears she once relied on this “ritual” as a means to escape her own reality. Her kinship with Alice was more than just

an interest in the story, instead Alice served as a sort of safe space Cathy could go to in times of need.

Now a middle-aged woman, Cathy is unable to escape the innumerable amount of threats to her wellbeing. The narrator describes her as “cold and desolate, alone and desolate” (549). With tears streaming down her face, Cathy grapples with childhood memories and the state of her current situation. But when she momentarily changes her trace of thought, resemblances of a less-developed, more pompous version of Cathy begin to shine through once again. She ponders, “Whatever she had done, she had been driven to do. She was different- she had something more than other people.. That was true. She was smarter and stronger than other people… That was true… She had something they lacked” (549-550). Almost as suddenly as this reversal of thought had come, it had disappeared. The narrator recounts, “And in the middle of her thought, Cal’s dark face hung in the air in front of her and his lips were smiling with cruelty” (550). Despite Cathy’s attempt to reassure herself of her own self-righteousness, the memory of her other son, Cal, effectively triggered her. This memory alone pushes Cathy to the brink and solidifies her decision to end her life.

Cathy’s vision of Cal continues, “They had something she lacked, and she didn’t know what it was” (550). Now reconciled to the notion that she is, in fact, the one who is lacking something, Cathy continues her downward spiral. The narrator proceeds, “Once she knew this, she was ready; and once ready, she knew she had been ready for a long time- perhaps all of her life” (550). The mention of her suicidal ideations along with her current decision reveals a deeply troubled side of Cathy that readers were not previously made aware of.

As Cathy continued with her preparations, “her mind functioned like a wooden mind, her body moved crookedly like a badly operated marionette” (550). Similarly to how she went about planning and committing Faye’s murder, Cathy completely detaches herself from the moment and moves almost robotically. In the midst of her decision, Cathy comes face to face with her “employees” for the last time. Although Cathy did not let on to what she had planned, she “was a sick ghost, crooked and in some way horrible” (550). As she bid the girls goodnight, her expression startled them more than her kind words: “She leaned against the dining-room wall and smiled at her girls, and her smile frightened them even more, for it was like the frame for a scream” (550). Even in her final moments, Cathy still refuses to reveal her vulnerability and weaknesses to others, despite her pain being obvious in her smile.

Once alone, for the final time, Cathy continues her “simple procedure” (550). She writes her will and states, “I leave everything I have to my son Aron Trask” and signs it “Catherine Trask” (550). A seemingly simple gesture, but given Cathy’s declination with Adam and motherhood, it holds an exuberant amount of meaning. Despite the chaotic circumstances, Cathy’s status as “Catherine Trask” and Aron’s mother still mean something to her..

As she nears the end of her procedure, Cathy perfects the one thing she has always used as a weapon: her looks. The narrator claims, “Then she went to her dressing table and combed her hair, rubbed a little rogue all over her face, covered it lightly with powder, and put on the pale lipstick she always used” (551). Similarly to how Cathy has always been described by the narrator, she is sure of her decision and methodical in her actions.

Laying herself down on propped up pillows, Cathy “felt rather gay, as though she were going to a party” (551). She carefully retrieved the little tube she kept on the chain of her bodice and smiled at it. In a childlike state, she repeats the famous words, “Eat me” and “Drink me” as she swallows the poisonous capsule (551).

She struggles to force her mind to stay on Alice, “so tiny and waiting," but this attempt proves itself to be useless as she is bombarded with the apparitions of those she has wronged. The narrator states, “Other faces peered in from the sides of her eyes- her father and mother, and Charles, and Adam, and Samuel Hamilton, and then Aron, and she could see Cal smiling at her” (551). The face of her son, Cal, is the same face who earlier solidified her fatal decision. The narrator continues, “The glint of his eyes said, ‘You missed something. They had something and you missed it” (551). Once again, Cathy is tormented with the idea that she is lacking something that everyone else has.

She tries to push the thought back and focus on the one thing she does have: Alice. As she fantasizes about finally being with her , a more childlike version of Cathy is depicted. She is once again referred to as ‘Cathy’, no longer the madame named ‘Kate’. As the capsule dissolved within her, Cathy fixated on a nail hole in the wall: “Alice would be in there. And she would put her arm around Cathy’s waist, and Cathy would put her arm around Alive’s waist, and they would walk away- best friends- and as tiny as the head of a pin” (551).

The effects of the capsule soon became apparent as Cathy’s whole body began to turn numb. She “thought or said or thought, ‘Alice doesn’t know. I’m going right on past’” (551). In her last moments, the narrator reveals her thinking. Even in Alice’s smallness, she will be unable to reach Cathy because she will have disappeared into

nothingness. As the poison takes over Cathy, her eyes flash in terror until they close one last time. The narrator observes, “And her heartbeat solemnly and her beating slowed as she grew smaller and smaller and then disappeared- and she had never been” (551).

As tragic as this scene is, it leaves readers more confused than somber. The narrator deliberately chose to exclude Cathy’s obsession with Alice’s character until her last moments. This begs the question: why? If readers had known just how scared and alone she felt as a young girl, then maybe they could have understood why she wanted to run away. If her inner thoughts were accessible to readers, would we have understood her conscience, or lack thereof? Until her last appearance, Cathy’s decision-making abilities are questioned by the narrator and readers alike. But, given this rare insight into her thoughts, emotions, and memories, readers are left second guessing, not Cathy, but the narrator and themselves.

With these scenes in mind: Cathy’s assault, her reunion with Adam, and her suicide, it is difficult to come to any solid, textually justifiable conclusions on her character. Despite the severity of Cathy’s obsession with Alice and the details of her troubled youth, it is difficult to muster up sympathy for a character the narrator spent five hundred pages vilifying. Therefore, the same sense of ambiguity that surrounded most of Cathy’s life within the text, is left among readers, who, up until this point, thought they slightly knew her. When in reality, no one, not even the narrator or Steinbeck himself, could understand Cathy. For that reason, her character will remain incomprehensible to readers and critics alike.

CONCLUSION

John Steinbeck's novel, *East of Eden,* which he believed to be his best work, continues to astound readers with its ambitious goals and complicated plot to this day. The text's most discussed and critically analyzed character, Cathy Ames, puzzles readers with her heartless behavior and murderous tendencies. Despite her contradictory characterization, readers are entranced by Cathy and left stupefied when they must come to their own conclusions on her.

Despite Steinbeck's favorable attitude towards her, Cathy's characterization has garnered immense critical attention since the novel's publication. The consensus seems to be split down the middle: Either Steinbeck was sexist and created an impossible character that was able to play both the Madonna and the whore because of his own patriarchal views; or he was purposeful in his characterization by creating the modern (mid-twentieth century) man's feminine nightmare. Either way, Cathy's portrayal, to this day, incites passionate responses from critics, despite their stance on her or her portrayal.

The narrator, who closely resembles Steinbeck himself, spends a majority of Cathy's chapters vilifying her. Ever since her first appearance, the narrator manipulates readers into immediately disliking Cathy. Before he mentions her life story, he makes a point to mention the existence of monsters, which only further dehumanizes Cathy to readers. The narrator's personal asides and negative sentiments towards her are sprinkled throughout every chapter that she is mentioned in. This, coupled with the heinousness of Cathy's crimes, makes it almost impossible for readers to like or sympathize with her character.

Even though the narrator is adamant in his portrayal of Cathy, Steinbeck, the author, was far more understanding of her actions. During his correspondence with his editor, he revealed the necessity of Cathy's character and called her his "dear Cathy". He understood that her character would garner negative attention and possibly scare parents, but he stayed true to his goal and continued to create her the way he saw fit. This warm, more accepting attitude towards Cathy is not shared with the narrator or any other character within *EoE.* Access to Steinbeck's letters reveals the author's intent when creating Cathy. Although this allows readers to understand the author and his motives a bit more, it stands in stark contrast to the overwhelming presence of the narrator, who, as readers know, finds Cathy deplorable.

Within this six-hundred page novel, the narrator denotes about eighteen pages to Cathy's life story. In this lengthy description that includes countless narrative interruptions, readers learn how Cathy ended up on the doorstep of the Trask brothers. Although her physical descriptions paint the picture of a beautiful, lovely girl, her actions destroy that illusion. From falsely accusing two boys of sexual assault; lying about and possibly instigating the death of her schoolteacher; to murdering her parents, Cathy appears to be truly evil. This introductory chapter serves as readers' first taste of Cathy, and despite the contradictory statements and revelations that come after it, it leaves a bitter state in their mouths.

Upon further inspection of the novel, readers learn that Cathy's character is not nearly as cut-and-dried as the narrator would have liked us to believe. When scenes that involve the assault of other characters are compared to the description of Mr. Edwards nearly beating Cathy to death, readers can clearly identify the narrator's bias. Without

any type of sympathy expressed towards this badly beaten woman, the narrator simply observes and recounts her moves. Using dehumanizing language, Cathy is stripped of her humanity, even in her most vulnerable state. Examples such as these further reveal the narrator's distaste for Cathy and the extent to which readers' sympathies are manipulated.

During her last few scenes, readers finally see a different side of Cathy, one that the narrator was either purposely excluding or did not have access to. When Cathy and Adam are reunited at Kate's Brothel, her reactions disclose her need to remain in control. Dissatisfied with Adam's lack of betrayal or care, Cathy pulls out every move she can in order to manipulate him. When her efforts fail, readers witness an enraged Cathy resort to screaming and acts of violence. The intensity of her reactions, alongside the fear evident throughout her body, unveils the seriousness of Cathy's need for control and submission, a fact we never learned from the narrator.

When readers do learn more about the novel's most titillating character, it comes just pages before her death. At that point, readers had been conditioned to believe that Cathy was a monster who deserved the bad things that happened to her. As she prepares herself to die, memories of childhood trauma bombard Cathy, and, for the first time, readers learn of her lifelong sadness. Within these never-before mentioned memories is Cathy's obsession and friendship with the childhood novel *Alice in Wonderland.* Readers are essentially reintroduced to her character as they learn about her childhood fears and outbursts; lifelong suicidal ideations; and fascination with Alice. As Cathy solidifies her decision to commit suicide, she comes to the bleak realization that *she* is the one missing something, not everyone else. After hundreds of pages of disliking this seemingly evil woman, readers are left confused at the last-minute details surrounding Cathy's psyche.

Despite the staggering amount of information about Cathy presented to readers, it is difficult to come to any sort of concrete conclusion on her character. If we examine Steinbeck's letters, then she is a complicated monster whose decisions make sense. On the other hand, the narrator's manipulation throughout the text inclines readers to view Cathy as an immortal monster whose behavior is completely unwarranted. In spite of that, there are numerous instances throughout the novel that reveal a more complex, traumatized version of her. With all of these different components in mind, Cathy's character defies simple categorization .

Throughout the novel, other characters undergo hardships and emotional turmoils that easily arouse understanding and sympathy from readers. However, Cathy's portrayal prompts a wide range of reactions and emotions among readers. We are meant to feel so many different things for her: fascination, distrust, hatred, and, eventually, sympathy. Without her inner dialogue to decipher her actions and feelings, readers' responses vary from scene to scene, further entangling their view of her.

Given all of the conflicting information presented in the text and in Steinbeck's letters, how are readers meant to understand Cathy Ames? With all of this evidence in mind, it is safe to say that readers are never meant to understand her. Perhaps the very thing that made Cathy so different from others is exactly what makes her so difficult to grasp. Similarly to how she mystified other characters in the book, she does the same to readers. Although there is no concrete diagnosis or explanation that would reason away her actions or clear up readers' confusion, one thing is for sure: "Cathy left a scent of sweetness behind her" (88).

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