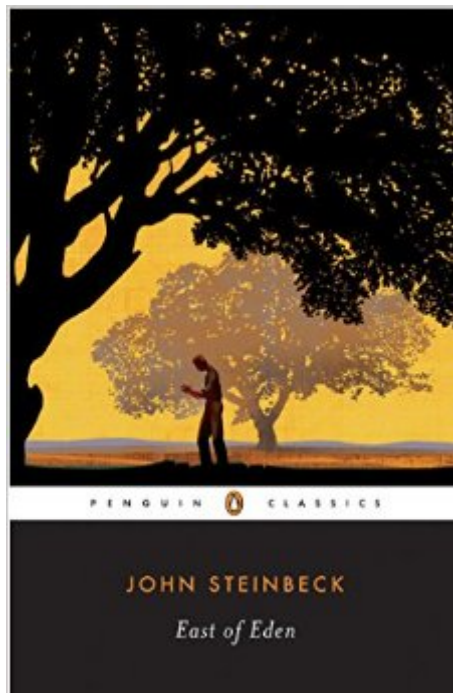


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# East Of Eden (Penguin Twentieth Century Classics)



## Synopsis

A masterpiece of Biblical scope, and the magnum opus of one of America's most enduring authors. In his journal, Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck called *East of Eden* "the first book," and indeed it has the primordial power and simplicity of myth. Set in the rich farmland of California's Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel. The masterpiece of Steinbeck's later years, *East of Eden* is a work in which Steinbeck created his most mesmerizing characters and explored his most enduring themes: the mystery of identity, the inexplicability of love, and the murderous consequences of love's absence. Adapted for the 1955 film directed by Elia Kazan introducing James Dean and read by thousands as the book that brought Oprah's Book Club back, *East of Eden* has remained vitally present in American culture for over half a century. This Penguin Classics edition features an introduction by David Wyatt. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's always difficult reading a book that has been praised to the skies without expecting too much, and that's why it usually fails to deliver. Those who read it after this book became an Oprah Book Club selection seem to have come to it with just such expectations. Try, however, to always approach a book or movie, however much it has been praised, as any other. Simply pick it up and read it without any expectations. This is how I read it, and gosh, was I pleasantly surprised. The characters are people I wish I could know personally--especially Samuel, I wished I could be one of his many children just to have him as a father; Lee, so taciturn yet wise and always there, such a comfort to have and know such a person; and Caleb, whom we tend to identify with in so many ways. True, the story might have extremes, and be predictable if you were able to keep yourself so uninvolved in the story. Those who commented on the 'plot', perhaps such a book is not what you ought to read. Pick up a Grisham or some other fast-paced 'plotty' book. *East of Eden* is for those who think, who care about who they are and who they want to be or ought to have been. People have talked of its being depressing. It's not. I hate depressing books myself. At least it's not a meaningless depression in which you can't identify with the story at all, but it simply sucks you down. This book made me cry at many points--from empathy or sympathy for the characters, from the beauty of the language, and from appreciating the wisdom in it. I admire passages, descriptions, dialogues so much in this book that I re-read them, and re-read the entire novel already, and may do so again. I'm not the kind who likes to re-read books either. There's simply so much wisdom and simplicity and reassurance in here that it's a treasure--for me, at least. I think I'm lucky to have a book that means so much to me.

John Steinbeck's *EAST OF EDEN* was not well received by critics when it debuted in the 1950s, and although passing years have seen several re-evaluations it is still regarded as secondary to the likes of *GRAPES OF WRATH* and *OF MICE AND MEN*. It is true that the novel is flawed: it is a great big rambling thing crammed with obvious allegory, metaphor, and allusion, loosely structured to say the least. And yet, in a odd sort of way, the very rambling, the looseness, the obviousness of the work gives it a tremendous grandeur that Steinbeck's more tightly structured work lacks. The novel is as broad and vulgar and lively and provocative as the America it describes--and it is my favorite of Steinbeck's fiction. Any one who comes to the novel from the famous film adaptation starring James Dean will be surprised, for the roots of the novel run much deeper than the film, which is based only on perhaps a third of the novel. This is not so much the story of brothers Aaron and Caleb Trask as it is the story of their parents, Adam Trask and Catherine Ames. And in "Cathy" Ames, Steinbeck creates one of the darkest characters in all of 20th Century American Literature, a

creature devoid of virtually anything recognizable as human emotion. Fleeing from a past that includes murder, perversion, blackmail, and prostitution, Cathy assumes an angelic demeanor and lures the emotionally needy Adam Trask into love and marriage. And when she no longer requires his protection... she destroys him. It is the stuff of classic melodrama, but in Steinbeck's hands it becomes more than melodrama; it becomes a novel that alternately reads at leisurely pace and then suddenly reads with the speed of a whirlwind, a tale that forces us to consider the nature of good and evil and the legacies we may leave for later generations. For Adam and Cathy have two sons, and in the wake of their tragedy they will be left to fight out issues of moral choices, right and wrong, and love and hate in the sun-drenched Salinas Valley of California, the "golden west" of the "new world" as it rushes headlong into the modern age. It is a novel epic in history, geography, and morality. Some will find the novel's constant reference to the story of Cain and Able more than a little obvious; others will find it too meandering, filled with too many side-issues and minor subplots. Still others may be put off by the very slow way in which the novel gathers itself during its first hundred or so pages. But once the pieces are in place, Steinbeck suddenly pulls the threads together to create one of the most remarkable tapestries in American letters--a tapestry that has no clearcut boundaries and that, for all its simplistic tone, offers little in the way of simplistic answers to the issues it raises. Flawed, yes, but a great novel by a master of the form, so great that its flaws become intrinsic to its virtues. Strongly recommended. GFT, Reviewer

John Steinbeck is at his best in this classic tale of sibling rivalry as he examines what we become vs. what we \*may\* become. The Biblical tale of Cain and Abel sets the tone as we are introduced to two sets of brothers. Each tries to win the love of his father in different ways. The story of why one brother succeeds while another feels unloved is beautifully told. Adam Trask, from the first set of brothers, repeats his own story with his sons, the twins Aron and Caleb. The enduring themes of light vs. dark, good vs. evil, hatred vs. love, and always the free will, the ability to choose one's own destiny are paramount to this rich and multi-layered tale. Above all, it is the characters you will long remember from this riveting saga. Cathy, the whore with a heart of stone, has to be one of the most evil characters in all literature. She kills her parents, beds her husband's brother on her wedding night, shoots her husband and deserts her infant sons. And, all this before she turns really bad! Truly a character to be analyzed for decades to come. On the other hand there are the wonderful characters of Samuel and Lee, men you will long remember for their wisdom, caring, and sheer goodness. And there is Adam, a zombie of a man until his great re-birth and spectacular failure finds him caught in a web of good and evil that he will long struggle with. John Steinbeck puts himself into

the novel, as Samuel Hamilton is based on his own maternal grandfather. The entire Hamilton clan is one that represents the true "salt of the earth" and elevates this to "great American novel" stature. The story is complex and involving, the characters unforgettable. Kudos to Oprah for reviving interest in this wonderful story.

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