

To a God Unknown (Penguin Classics)

By John Steinbeck

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Ancient pagan beliefs, the great Greek epics, and the Bible all inform this extraordinary novel by Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck, which occupied him for more than five difficult years. While fulfilling his dead father's dream of creating a prosperous farm in California, Joseph Wayne comes to believe that a magnificent tree on the farm embodies his father's spirit. His brothers and their families share in Joseph's prosperity, and the farm flourishes—until one brother, frightened by Joseph's pagan belief, kills the tree, allowing disease and famine to descend on the farm. Set in familiar Steinbeck country, **To a God Unknown** is a mystical tale, exploring one man's attempt to control the forces of nature and, ultimately, to understand the ways of God and the forces of the unconscious within. This edition features an introduction and notes by Steinbeck scholar Robert DeMott.

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To a God Unknown (Penguin Classics) By John Steinbeck Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #101449 in Books
- Brand: Penguin Classics
- Published on: 1995-08-01
- Released on: 1995-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.70" h x .38" w x 5.00" l, .36 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

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About the Author

John Steinbeck, born in Salinas, California, in 1902, grew up in a fertile agricultural valley, about twenty-five miles from the Pacific Coast. Both the valley and the coast would serve as settings for some of his best fiction. In 1919 he went to Stanford University, where he intermittently enrolled in literature and writing courses until he left in 1925 without taking a degree. During the next five years he supported himself as a laborer and journalist in New York City, all the time working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929).

After marriage and a move to Pacific Grove, he published two California books, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), and worked on short stories later collected in *The Long Valley* (1938). Popular success and financial security came only with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), stories about Monterey's paisanos. A ceaseless experimenter throughout his career, Steinbeck changed courses regularly. Three powerful novels of the late 1930s focused on the California laboring class: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and the book considered by many his finest, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). *The Grapes of Wrath* won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1939.

Early in the 1940s, Steinbeck became a filmmaker with *The Forgotten Village* (1941) and a serious student of marine biology with *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He devoted his services to the war, writing Bombs Away (1942) and the controversial play-novelette *The Moon is Down* (1942).*Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1948), another experimental drama, *Burning Bright*(1950), and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951) preceded publication of the monumental *East of Eden* (1952), an ambitious saga of the Salinas Valley and his own family's history.

The last decades of his life were spent in New York City and Sag Harbor with his third wife, with whom he traveled widely. Later books include *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (1957), *Once There Was a War* (1958), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961),*Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), *America and Americans* (1966), and the posthumously published *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* (1969), *Viva Zapata!*(1975), *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976), and *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath* (1989).

Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1962, and, in 1964, he was presented with the United States Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Steinbeck died in New York in 1968. Today, more than thirty years after his death, he remains one of America's greatest writers and cultural figures.

Robert DeMott, editor, is the Edwin and Ruth Kennedy Distinguished Professor at Ohio State University and author of *Steinbeck's Typewriter*, an award-winning book of critical essays.

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