



John Steinbeck: The Voice of the Land

Keith Ferrell

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John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in California's Salinas River Valley. Although he worked briefly as a reporter in New York, it was in the Salinas Valley that he spent the Depression years, and his experiences and the people he met became the basis for his books. *Of Mice and Men* opened the eyes of the public to the desperate lives of the migrant workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* told the story of the destitute Oklahoma dust bowl farmers who flocked to the Valley in search of work, *Cannery Row* painted the rough and tumble lives of the cannery workers in nearby Monterey. And *East of Eden*, his most personal novel, revolved around the lives of two families from the Valley whose story was a tragic metaphor for the suffering humans needlessly cause one another.

Steinbeck was the recipient of both the Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes for Literature and was named to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His books were likewise embraced by the public—many reached the top of the bestseller lists; four of them were made into Broadway shows; and six were made into movies.

Despite these successes, he often doubted his abilities. The critics were seldom kind to him, making his doubts grow. But at the end of his life he realized that by championing the causes of the underprivileged, he had made a lasting impression on the social consciousness of America. He died in New York in 1968.

Keith Ferrell gives us a fascinating account of John Steinbeck, a writer who continually struggled to awaken America's social conscience. Steinbeck's ability to incorporate the dark side of life in rich stories of human strength has captured the souls of millions of readers everywhere.

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