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THE PULITZER PRIZE ARCHIVE

A History and Anthology of
Award-winning Materials in
Journalism, Letters, and Arts

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Federal Republic of Germany

PART D: BELLES LETTRES

Volume 10

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**Novel / Fiction
Awards
1917 - 1994**

From Pearl S. Buck and Margaret Mitchell
to Ernest Hemingway and John Updike

Edited with general and special
introductions by
Heinz-Dietrich Fischer
in cooperation with
Erika J. Fischer

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PREFACE

With the volume on hand this series of publications for the first time is turning to the field of fiction that holds an eminent place within the Pulitzer Prize system. J. Douglas Bates once tried to account for this fact by offering the following explanation: "An argument can be made that Joseph Pulitzer's journalism prizes never would have become famous if he hadn't tacked on the separate awards in arts and letters. These first national prizes for books and plays captured the public attention right from the start. And that happened primarily as a result of headline-grabbing controversy."

Indeed the other Pulitzer Prizes hardly ever provoked such controversial opinions as the one that in the early years from 1917 onwards was known under the term of "Novel" and in 1949 was renamed "Fiction". In all eight decades of awarding the prize there was repeatedly strong, sometimes even harsh criticism of the decisions made by the jury and the Pulitzer Prize Board respectively. And time and again names of authors were publicly discussed that - for whatever reasons - were never even considered for the prestigious award.

In this respect the book at hand not only is a complete documentation of the laureates but - running along the jury reports - an exciting inside-story on the annual decision-making process of selecting, nominating and bestowing the prize in all of the various committees. Franz Schneider stated once that, from the point of view of an communications scientist, "the interdependency of the decisive discussions of such committees and the so-called public opinion" forms actually one of the very "central problems of communication sciences."

That the time-consuming research for this and the preceding volumes could be carried out, once again is largely due to the kind support of Prof. Dr. Dietrich Oppenberg (publisher of the NRZ - Neue Ruhr/Rhein Zeitung, Essen, and head of the ECON book publishing company, Düsseldorf). To Professor Seymour Topping and Mr. Edward M. Kliment (The Pulitzer Prize Office at Columbia University, New York) we are indebted for the provision of important material. Help and support in various forms came from Mr.

Carroll Brown (President of the American Council on Germany, New York) as well as his fellow workers Mrs. Karen Furey and Mr. Eric Graage.

Unfortunately, in most cases it was not possible to obtain the rights to reprint short excerpts from the Pulitzer Prize-winning books documented in this volume. The authors or their descendants usually could not be traced, and the publishing houses only rarely responded to requests relating to this matter. Then Dr. Daniel Boehnk, attorney at law (Cologne/New York), meritoriously turned our attention to the "Doctrine of Fair Use" as embodied in the United States Copyright Act of 1976, as amended. According to this doctrine excerpts of copyrighted works in the context of a compendium or a work of reference - as is absolutely the case with the book on hand - may be reprinted when the quotation does not encompass a substantial portion of the copyrighted work and enhances public awareness and value of the work in question.

As we are obliged to a number of other people who helped that this book could be completed in the long run, we would like to express our gratitude and give them credit by naming them in alphabetical order: Mr. Tony Abrahamson (New York), Mrs. Gitte A. Berkelie-Hinze (Frankfurt a.M.), Mrs. Elizabeth Brennan (New York), Mrs. Teresa Buswell (New York), Mr. Mac Chaudhry (Marco Island, Fl.), Miss Mady Cohen (New York), Mr. Jonathan Delcour (New York), Mr. Jürgen H. Giesbert (New York), Mr. Larry Heinzerling (New York), Mrs. Becky Hemperly (Boston, Ma.), Mrs. Brigitte James (Bonn), Mrs. Anne Lewis (Washington, D.C.), Mr. Norman Mailer (New York), Mrs. Lori Mardock (Minneapolis, Min.), Mr. Robert McCormack (New York), Mr. Jonathan W. Pilgrim (Munich), Mr. Stephen Plotkin (Boston, Ma.) and Mrs. Erika Seidman (New York).

At the Ruhr-University Bochum Mrs. Ingrid Dickhut made the manuscript ready for print, drew up the index and furthermore accomplished the typographical design of the book, as she has done for all the previous volumes in this series. In the same proven way, Mr. Olaf Jubin, M.A., took on tasks of translation and coordination, whereas Miss Friederike Erlinghagen attended to biographical assignments and Mr. Mücahit Yildiz was engaged in specific bibliographical research.

Bochum, FRG
August, 1996

E.J.F./H.-D.F.

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THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO



WILLIAM FAULKNER (1897 - 1962)
PULITZER PRIZE WINNER 1955 AND 1963 -
ON HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR NOVEL / FICTION

by Heinz-Dietrich Fischer

When Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911) produced a first rough draft of an outline for the prizes to be named after him in his will of 1904, there were also prizes for the arts among them. "One does not know... precisely what was in the mind of Joseph Pulitzer... when he realized a long dream and set up his literary prizes," as Carlos Baker remarks and continues: "Encouragement to writers, certainly. He was a very vigorous writer himself... But Mr. Pulitzer... was first of all a newspaperman of very high standards. And a newspaperman has been defined as one who feels impelled, if he can find no excitement, to stir some up. The establishment of the prizes may be seen as a noble device for stirring up interest in American letters..."¹ Pulitzer was indeed always extremely interested in issues and problems that extended beyond journalism. As an example of this one of his secretaries remembers a conversation with the newspaperman, of which he recounts that: Pulitzer "carried me from country to country, from century to century, through history, art, literature, biography, economics, music, the drama, and current politics."²

In view of such a wide-ranging spectrum of interests it came as no surprise in the end that the pressman Pulitzer also included honors for outstanding literary works in his prize categories. He defined the most prominent award, the prize for fiction, as follows: Annually, "for the American Novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life, and the highest standard of American manners and manhood."³ When the Advisory Board of the Columbia School of Journalism convened in May 1915 to undertake the task of advertising the competition for the first Pulitzer Prize for those novels to be published in the fol-

1 Carlos Baker, Fiction Awards, in: *Columbia Library Columns* (New York), Vol. VI/No. 3, May 1957, pp. 30 f.

2 Alleyne Ireland, *An Adventure with a Genius. Recollections of Joseph Pulitzer*, New York 1914, p. 80.

3 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes. A History of the Awards in Books, Drama, Music, and Journalism*, New York - London 1974, p. 55.

lowing year, "it approved the Plan of Award for the Pulitzer Prizes in substantially the same form as the wording of Pulitzer's will," Hohenberg writes, adding: "But on June 10, 1915, when President Butler (of Columbia University) presented the Plan of Award to the university's Trustees and the executors of the Pulitzer estate, he included in it amendments that he called 'slight' and 'insubstantial.' Apparently he had made them himself,"⁴ which led, to an extent, to irritations.

Some of the minor changes carried out by Butler may have indeed been insignificant, yet "the only one that affected the specifications for the prizes," Hohenberg explains, "was the change in the fiction award from 'whole' to 'wholesomee' - which was carefully indicated with the added four letters being printed in italics... Evidently, the Pulitzer executors must have had their doubts. They asked Butler to refer this change, with the rest, to the Advisory Board for its approval. The president, never one to leave anything to chance, wrote individually to the Board members on June 22, 1915, enclosing a revised, printed Plan of Award dated June 10, 1915, and asking them to agree to it. They did, without argument. What prompted Butler's historic afterthought remains a mystery. But after the requirement for 'wholesome' fiction went into the Plan of Award, it remained there from the beginning in 1917"⁵ for about a decade. So "it was foreordained that the first Fiction Jury would have its troubles finding a respectable prize winner that was also 'wholesomee' in the Butlerian sense,"⁶ Hohenberg states.

When the first Pulitzer Prize Novel jury (Robert Grant, William M. Payne and William L. Phelps) came together in the spring of 1917 to determine a prize-winner based on the novels published in 1916, the following situation arose: "There were only six applicants for the prize," as the report of the jurors indicates verbatim, "one of whom sent, not a printed book but a manuscript, which fails to meet the requirement of publication during the year. Of the five books submitted in competition, all but one seem to us unworthy of consideration for the prize. We are unanimously of the opinion, however, that the merits of this book, though considerable, are no greater than that of several other novels, which though not included in the formal applications, have been taken into consideration by us in arriving at a verdict. We recommend," the jurors wrote furthermore, "that the award be withheld this year for the reason that no American novel of 1916 stands out so conspicuously from the rest as to deserve this special mark of recognition. An award

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 55 f.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

by us would only mean a choice among equals and would be liable to misinterpretation."⁷ The Advisory Board of the School of Journalism and the Trustees of Columbia University, that in the end had the definitive last word on awarding the Pulitzer Prize, accepted the verdict of the jury and decided on "no award" in the novel category.⁸

As it could not be inferred from the jury-report of 1917 which books had actually been submitted, Hohenberg attempted to trace at least a few of the titles that were eligible and was successful. His investigation deemed that the following three titles were among the total of five novels that the jury had had at hand: *Windy McPherson's Son*, by Sherwood Anderson; *The Leatherstocking*, by William Dean Howells; *Life and Gabriella*, by Ellen Glasgow.⁹ The dissatisfaction of the jurors with the submitted works of fiction led to a recommendation at the end of their report stating that "it would be advisable in future to give the jury a longer period for consideration, so that the field can be more comprehensively covered, especially if the material submitted by the formal applicants does not rise above the very low level of this year. It would seem well also," the jury suggested furthermore, "that the existence of this annual prize... should be more widely advertised, or at least called to the attention of the established writers of the country, so that in one way or another the important books may be included among the formal entries."¹⁰

It is not known whether the suggestions of the jury were taken up and whether attempts to increase public awareness of the prize resulted in a higher number of submissions in the following year, because the report of that year's jury (Robert Grant, William M. Payne and William L. Phelps) does not impart any information on the number of contestants in 1918. It was stated concisely in the jury-report "that the majority of the Committee award the Pulitzer Prize for the best novel of 1917 to *His Family*, by Ernest Poole. The Committee unites in according honorable mention to *Bromley Neighborhood*, by Alice Brown."¹¹ The Advisory Board as well as the Trustees accepted part of the jury's proposal and for the first time awarded a Pulitzer Prize in the novel category, which went to Ernest Poole,¹² whereas there is no information available on whether the jury's other proposal to

7 Robert Grant/William M. Payne/William L. Phelps, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Boston, May 8, 1917, pp. 1 f.

8 Columbia University (Ed.), The Pulitzer Prizes 1917-1991, New York 1991, p. 51.

9 John Hohenberg, The Pulitzer Prizes, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

10 Robert Grant/William M. Payne/William L. Phelps, Report..., *op. cit.*, p. 2.

11 Robert Grant/William M. Payne/William L. Phelps, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Boston, April 10, 1918, p. 1.

12 Columbia University (Ed.), The Pulitzer Prizes, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

bestow a honorable mention on Alice Brown also met with success. With regard to the prize-winning book by Poole, Hohenberg is of the opinion that it "had not made anything like the impression of Poole's earlier and more successful work, *The Harbor*, which was similar in spirit to the Edward Bellamy-Jack London type of sentimental Socialism. So, while *His Family* carried off the award, there wasn't much of a stir about it."¹³

In 1919, with the same jurors as in the two preceding years (Robert Grant, William M. Payne and William L. Phelps) once again in office, the chairman of the jury wrote to the President of Columbia University on behalf of all of the members: "I hereby report that the Committee, after careful consideration, has reluctantly reached the conclusion, that no one of the novels of 1918 merits this distinction."¹⁴ The Advisory Board had practically already accepted this recommendation, when one of the members of the jury approached the administration of Columbia University, without previous notice, with nothing less than a revision of the initial jury vote camouflaged in the form of a question: "Is it too late to give the novel prize to Booth Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons*? I have a letter from Judge Grant..., who says 'I would have voted to give it the prize rather than not award one.'"¹⁵ Thus because two of the three jurors favored the same contestant, as Hohenberg reports, Columbia President Nicholas M. Butler consequently "fired off telegrams to each member of the Advisory Board and drew unanimous approval for *The Magnificent Ambersons*. It was, accordingly, enshrined as the fiction winner for 1919 at Columbia's Commencement,"¹⁶ when Booth Tarkington received the Pulitzer Prize for best novel of the year.¹⁷

The jury acting in 1920 (Robert Grant, William L. Phelps and Stuart P. Sherman) had some new members. As can be quoted from its report, this jury was "of the opinion that 'no award' should be made,"¹⁸ and this was, in the end, also accepted by the Advisory Board and the Trustees.¹⁹ Before the decision of the jury was reached, however, the discussions turned into a remarkable controversy, caused by the new juror Stuart P. Sherman: "He had

13 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

14 Robert Grant/William M. Payne/William L. Phelps, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Boston, April 22, 1919, p. 1.

15 William L. Phelps, Letter to Frank D. Fackenthal, Provost of Columbia University, New Haven, Ct., May 20, 1919, p. 1.

16 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 f.

17 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

18 Robert Grant/William L. Phelps/Stuart P. Sherman, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Boston, April 29, 1920, p. 1.

19 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

thought", as Hohenberg reconstructs the situation, "of recommending Joseph Hergesheimer's *Java Head* for the prize until he re-read the terms of the Plan of Award," that contained in place of Pulitzer's original wording 'whole' the term 'wholesomee', inserted by Butler.²⁰ In a note to the chairman of the jury Sherman had "agreed that the Hergesheimer novel 'doesn't at all obviously conform' to the conditions of the award but protested: 'If the jury sticks to the letter of these conditions, will it not make itself a laughing stock to the younger generation?... We ought not to crown a licentious work, but I don't believe we should hold off till a novel appears fit for a Sunday School library.' Sherman's argument for a loose interpretation of the rules was rejected... *Java Head* hadn't been 'wholesomee' enough,"²¹ Hohenberg states.

In 1921, the members of the jury (Hamlin Garland, Robert M. Lovett and Stuart P. Sherman) also differed in their opinions on who should win that year's Pulitzer Prize because, as John Hohenberg relates, "the issue posed by Sherman" in the year before "finally broke into the open with the publication of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, the most controversial book of 1920... The crusty Hamlin Garland, ... chairman in 1921 in both the Fiction and Drama Juries... kept his guard up against Lewis... In particular, he held *Main Street* to be 'vicious and vengeful'... As late as March 1921 he was writing, 'All the novels I have read recently are lacking in style, workmanship. I cannot vote a prize to any of them'... Yet, Garland joined in the Fiction Jury's vote for *Main Street*... The Fiction report to the Board, at its meeting on May 24, 1921, was for *Main Street*... As the minutes of the session dryly recorded," as Hohenberg continues his description of the background, "there was 'considerable discussion' of *Main Street*... In any event, the Board unanimously overturned the jury's proposal of *Main Street* and decided by a split vote to give the prize to Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, which also had been favorably mentioned in the report."²² This is how Edith Wharton wound up being the Pulitzer Prize-winner in the category of 'novel'.²³

After the public announcement of the winner, the bestowal of the award on Edith Wharton evoked a fierce debate as soon as the circumstances leading to the decision of 1921 were made public. As Hohenberg reports, Sherman and Lovett, the two members of the jury, "publicly protested in *The New Republic*... Neither Lovett nor Sherman threatened publicly to resign from a jury to which they had not yet been reappointed, an awkward action

20 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 58.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 58 f.

23 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

*The Age
of Innocence
by
Edith Wharton*



to which some protestors later resorted. They merely wanted the record to show what actually had happened. Despite the row, Sherman was asked to be chairman of the Fiction Jury in the following year."²⁴ The jurors of 1922 (Samuel M. Crothers, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Stuart P. Sherman), however, had no difficulties in reaching the unanimous recommendation "that Booth Tarkington's *Alice Adams* is the best novel of 1921 which can be construed as coming under the terms of the Pulitzer competition. We accordingly recommend it for the Pulitzer novel prize."²⁵ The Advisory Board as well as the Trustees agreed and honored Booth Tarkington with the award without any contradiction, although he had already won the same prize once before just three years earlier.²⁶

The jury of 1923 (Samuel M. Crothers, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Bliss Perry) saw only slight changes in personnel when compared to the previous year. It also arrived at a common suggestion. Yet the jurors' vote, penned by Fletcher, the chairman of the jury, read as follows: "I beg to report that the Committee recommends for the Pulitzer Prize to be awarded for the best American novel in 1922, *One of Ours* by Miss Willa Cather. I might perhaps add that this recommendation is made without enthusiasm. The Committee, as I understand its feeling, assumes that the Trustees of the Fund desire that award should be made each year. In that case, we are of the opinion that Miss Cather's novel, imperfect as we think it in many respects, is yet the most worth while of any in the field."²⁷ John Hohenberg indicates what cannot be inferred from the jury report: "The 1923 Fiction Jury rejected Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*, a lampoon of American business."²⁸ Once again, similar to the situation two years earlier, a novel by Lewis was passed over, because the reservations about the author and his work had been too strong. After the first case of neglect, Lewis had publicly protested against the way he had been snubbed, but this time he took the decision with utmost composure, uttering that he didn't "care a hang."²⁹ Thus Willa Cather received the Pulitzer Prize for 'best novel of 1923,'³⁰ this time without developing into a controversy.

24 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 59 f.

25 Samuel M. Crothers/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Stuart P. Sherman, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Urbana, Il., April 24, 1922, p. 1.

26 Cf. Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

27 Samuel M. Crothers/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Bliss Perry, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, April 3, 1923, p. 1.

28 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

29 Cf. Mark Schorer, *Sinclair Lewis - An American Life*, New York 1961, pp. 334, 374.

30 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

In 1924, when the jury consisted of the same members as in the year before (Samuel M. Crothers, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Bliss Perry), the award proposal sent to the administration of Columbia University once again seemed to be lacking in conviction. In the note written by the chairman of the jury to Frank D. Fackenthal, the Secretary of the University, it was stated verbatim that: "The committee on the Pulitzer Prize has arrived at the following decision: first, that in its opinion there is no book outstanding enough to merit a Prize this year, but that, secondly, if it is deemed that a prize should be awarded anyhow, the committee would name Margaret Wilson's *The Able McLaughlins*. It is understood, of course, that if the Trustees desire the award to be made no public announcement shall be made of the opinion of the committee that no book is worthy."³¹ The Advisory Board as well as the Trustees, however, had no doubts that *The Able McLaughlins* should win the Pulitzer Prize and had no problems in giving the honor to Margaret Wilson.³² Once again this decision was not followed by any further discussion, not to speak of a publically held one.

There was once again dissent in 1925, when the jurors (Oscar W. Firkins, Jefferson B. Fletcher and William A. White) stated in their report: "The jury has come to no full agreement. The issue hangs, however, between three novels: Joseph Hergesheimer's *Balisand*, Edna Ferber's *So Big*, and Lawrence Stallings's *Plumes*. Mr. White's first choice is *So Big*. Professor Firkins's is *Balisand*. For second choice both Mr. White and Professor Firkins name *Plumes*. If a positive choice by the Trustees is desired," Chairman Fletcher continued in his report, "I should prefer, myself, *Balisand*, but my greater preference under the circumstances would be to divide the prize between *Balisand* and *So Big*."³³ William A. White stressed in a separate vote, "that in the matter of style and technique *Balisand* was superior to either of the other two novels... I felt, on the other hand, that Miss Ferber's thesis was one badly needed in America and one which was dramatized with much skill... Hence, I stood for *So Big*..."³⁴ The third juror, O. W. Firkins, raised objections against this point of view, emphasizing: "I wish to register my emphatic protest against the award of the Pulitzer novel prize... exclusively to Miss Ferber's *So Big*," and he pleaded that the award be split

31 Samuel M. Crothers/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Bliss Perry, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, April 1, 1924, p. 1.

32 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

33 Jefferson B. Fletcher, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, April 3, 1925, p. 1.

34 William A. White, Letter to Frank D. Fackenthal, Secretary of Columbia University, New York, April 7, 1925, p.1.

between Hergesheimer and Ferber.³⁵ The Advisory Board and the Trustees decided against this proposal and declared Edna Ferber sole winner of the Pulitzer Prize 'for best novel'.³⁶

1926 turned out to be a special year in the history of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. A jury that was made up of three new members (Richard Burton, Edwin Lefevre and Robert M. Lovett) wrote in its report, "that *Arrowsmith* by Sinclair Lewis, is the novel best deserving the award... In the opinion of the Committee, several novels are worthy competitors, this be especially true of *The Smiths* by Janet Fairbanks, and *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward."³⁷ After Sinclair Lewis had been unsuccessful twice in the preceding years, he was now to be honored by winning the Pulitzer Prize in the novel category.³⁸ When the decision of the jury in favor of Lewis was reached round the middle of March 1926, Hohenberg reports that, "on March 30, Alfred Harcourt of Harcourt, Brace & Co., Lewis' publisher, wrote to him in Kansas City that he would win the Pulitzer Prize, upon which Lewis fired back a warning that he intended to refuse the award because of what he called the '*Main Street* burglary.' The Advisory Board recommended *Arrowsmith* for the prize on April 22 and Fackenthal wrote Lewis about it in confidence the following day because final action by the Trustees would not be taken until May 3. It gave Lewis all the time he needed to compose his letter of refusal, which he proceeded to do in consultation with Harcourt. Once the prize was announced, the letter was made public."³⁹

"That prize I must refuse," Sinclair Lewis wrote among other things to the Columbia University, "and my refusal would be meaningless unless I explained the reasons. All prizes, like all titles, are dangerous. The seekers for prizes tend to labor not for inherent excellence but for alien rewards... The Pulitzer Prize for Novels is peculiarly objectionable because the terms of it have been constantly and grievously misrepresented... The Pulitzer Prize for Novels... is tending to become a sanctified tradition... If already the Pulitzer Prize is so important, it is not absurd to suggest that in another generation it may, with the actual terms of the award ignored, become the one thing for which any ambitious novelist will strive."⁴⁰ Hohenberg

35 Oscar W. Firkins, Letter to the President of the Advisory Board on the Pulitzer Prizes, Minneapolis, April 23, 1925, p. 1.

36 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

37 Richard Burton/Edwin Lefevre/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, March 15, 1926, p. 1.

38 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

39 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

40 Sinclair Lewis, Letter to the Pulitzer Prize Committee at Columbia University, Kansas City, Mo., May 6, 1926, pp. 1 f.

observes with regard to Lewis' letter, that "in the age of ballyhoo, this was a master stroke. It echoed like thunder in the nation's headlines. The literati rallied to Lewis' side... However, the press in general criticized Lewis for his thirst for publicity and questioned the sincerity of his motives. There was a post-mortem at Columbia. Fackenthal wrote to Lewis on May 7, mildly protesting that his publishers should not have nominated *Arrowsmith* if they had known his attitude... The \$ 1,000 check, which Lewis had returned, was put back in the Pulitzer Prize Fund."⁴¹ Nevertheless, Sinclair Lewis, is listed as official award-winner of 1926 in the annals of the Pulitzer Prize.⁴²

Yet Lewis, who a few years later did not refuse to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature , indirectly brought about a change that was effectual for the Pulitzer Prize from 1927 onwards: "President Butler and the Advisory Board," Hohenberg writes, "quietly returned to the original wording of the Fiction award, as Joseph Pulitzer had set it down in his will. The insistence on 'wholesome' fiction, in theory at least, was dropped in favor of Pulitzer's specification for an American novel that best presented the 'whole atmosphere' of American life and the 'highest standard of American manners and manhood.' Hopefully, in this new dispensation, the jurors (Richard Burton, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Robert M. Lovett) turned to one of the younger and uncontroversial American novelists, Louis Bromfield, and recommended his third novel, *Early Autumn*, for the 1927 award."⁴³ In their report, which suggests a unanimous vote, the jurors added the wish "that it is the committee's unanimous opinion that in awarding the Prize in years to come, it would greatly expedite matters if three copies of all the books in competition were sent by the publishers so that a copy of each might be synchronously in the hands of the committee members."⁴⁴ Whereas the Advisory Board and the Trustees accepted Louis Bromfield as best novelist,⁴⁵ it is not known whether the jurors' other suggestion detailing how to improve their work was also taken up.

The jurors of 1928 (Richard Burton, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Robert M. Lovett) announced in their report "the unanimous nomination of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, as the recipient of this year's award. The decision is based on the opinion of the Committee," the report continues, "that this piece of fiction is not only an admirable example of literary

41 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

42 Cf. Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

43 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

44 Richard Burton/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Englewood, N.J., March 30, 1927, p. 1.

45 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

skill in the art of fiction, but also possesses a philosophic import and a spiritual elevation which greatly increases its literary value."⁴⁶ It can be inferred from an additional paper by the jurors that the following books were also among the finalists: *Islanders*, by Helen Hull; *A Yankee Passional*, by Samuel Ornitz; *The Grandmothers*, by Glenway Wescott; and *Black April*, by Julia M. Peterkin.⁴⁷ "The jury's choice for 1928," Hohenberg underlines "had nothing to do with American life or American manners and manhood, but the Advisory Board quickly accepted it," since "the critics already had hailed a major new talent" in Thornton Niven Wilder, who received the Pulitzer Prize of 1928⁴⁸ while still working as preparatory school teacher in Lawrenceville, Kansas. He was awarded the prize for a story that was set in old Peru.

"One result of the Fiction Jury's successful recommendation of a story about Peru," Hohenberg writes, "was still another change in the... wording of the terms of the award. The insistence on the 'highest standard of American manners and manhood' was dropped. Instead, in a general revision of the Plan of Award that took effect for the 1929 prize season, the requirement in fiction called for a prize 'for the American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best present the whole atmosphere of American life.'"⁴⁹ Now the jurors (Richard Burton, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Robert M. Lovett) had plenty of scope for interpretation, and in 1929 they decided in favor of *Victim and Victor* by John R. Oliver. "The Committee's choice," as it reads verbatim in the jury-report, "is made on the ground that this novel is of fine quality as a piece of literary work, deals with important elements in the native life, and has most unusual spiritual elevation and significance. It is a sound piece of literature and a noble interpretation of human character. For these reasons it stands out from the rank and file of current fiction, although the year brought forth a few admirable stories, and it may interest... to know that *Scarlet Sister Mary* by Julia Peterkin came close in our estimation to the winning book."⁵⁰ But this time the Advisory Board and the Trustees did not follow the suggestion of the jury and opted instead for Julia Peterkin and her book *Scarlet Sister Mary*.⁵¹

46 Richard Burton/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Englewood, N.J., March 6, 1928, p. 1.

47 Robert M. Lovett, Letter to Frank D. Fackenthal, Columbia University, Chicago, March 7, 1928, p. 1.

48 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

50 Richard Burton/Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, Englewood, N.J., March 13, 1929, pp. 1 f.

51 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

As one of the jurors of the previous year, Richard Burton, was suspected of having spilled out the decision of the jury beforehand,⁵² he was not reappointed in 1930. The new jury (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine), though, had problems in agreeing on a clear favorite for the prize. "Effectively," the jury-report indicates, "the choice of the committee is narrowed down to three books: *Laughing Boy*, by Oliver La Farge; *Look Homeward, Angel*, by Thomas Wolfe; and *It's a Great War*, by Mary Lee." Whereas juror Albert B. Paine chose the book by Thomas Wolfe, Jefferson B. Fletcher favored the novel *Laughing Boy*, and Robert M. Lovett deemed *It's a Great War* outstanding.⁵³ But as Paine and Lovett had given to understand, that they might join Fletcher's vote, it was stated in the report that: "The members of the committee are not quite in accord, but have individually expressed their willingness to compound their differences by voting for *Laughing Boy* by Oliver La Farge."⁵⁴ "President Butler was absent... when the Advisory Board met on April 24, 1930," as Hohenberg discovered, adding: "But the... members found no difficulty in agreeing on *Laughing Boy*, a choice the university Trustees accepted."⁵⁵ This is how, in the end, the prize for 'best novel' went to Oliver La Farge.⁵⁶

Columbia Secretary Fackenthal wrote to President Butler, as Hohenberg reports, "just before the opening of the judging for the 1931 prize, to suggest still another change in the terms of the award for fiction. Reviewing the patchwork that already had been done and the old argument over whether the novel should be 'wholesome', he concluded: The (Fiction) jury feels that in its present form the definition makes the Prize almost useless and what they would like would be a redefinition that would place the Novel Prize on the same basis as the Poetry Prize - that is, 'For the best novel published during the year by an American author.'"⁵⁷ While the Advisory Board was still dealing with this proposal, the jury (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine) took up its work and put three books on its short list: *The Deepening Stream*, by Dorothy Canfield; *Years of Grace*, by Margaret Ayer Barnes; and *The Great Meadow*, by Elizabeth Madox Roberts. In the end the jurors ranked *Years of Grace* first on their list of suggestions, "because of its vivid and interesting presentation of the change in

52 Cf. John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88 ff.

53 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 10, 1930, pp. 1 f.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

55 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

56 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

57 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

character and mores throughout three generations of an American family."⁵⁸ The Advisory Board as well as the Trustees endorsed this vote and therefore the Pulitzer Prize in the category 'novel' went to Margaret Ayer Barnes.⁵⁹

In 1932 when the same jurors as before (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine) selected from the submissions on hand, the jury regarded "as its first choice *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck. Two other books were favorably considered... Willa Cather's *Shadow on the Rock* and Robin E. Spencer's *The Lady Who Came to Stay*... Preference has been given to *The Good Earth*," the jury explained its choice "for its epic sweep, its distinct and moving characterization, its sustained story-interest, its simple and yet richly colored style... As a minor consideration, the Committee also took into account the fact that Miss Cather has already received the Pulitzer Prize. This fact was, however, not determining."⁶⁰ As both the Advisory Board and the Trustees were convinced by the jury's argumentation, the award was given to Pearl S. Buck.⁶¹ "For the time being," Hohenberg commenting on this decision, "the critical uproar subsided into a continuing grumble. To a bewildered people mired in a terrible economic breakdown, the story of the hardships of Chinese peasants somehow was most appealing. Mrs. Buck's book, therefore, was popularly accepted as 'the best novel published during the year by an American author,' regardless of somewhat muted critical objections."⁶²

The three jurors (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine), who had to decide on the award in 1933, explained briefly, when they made it known in their report that there was an "agreement upon *The Store* by Thomas S. Stribling, as the Pulitzer Prize novel for 1932."⁶³ After further inquiries by Columbia Secretary Fackenthal they elaborated that apart from said book four other novels had also made the jury's short list. Yet *The Store*, as it was stated verbatim "was selected chiefly because of its sustained interest, and because of the convincing and comprehensive picture it presents of life in an inland Southern community during the middle eighties of the last century. I think," the chairman of the jury continued, "that the fact that the same author, Mr. T. S. Stribling, gave us another good book,

58 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 26, 1931, p. 1.

59 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

60 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 14, 1932, p. 1.

61 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

62 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

63 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 16, 1933, p. 1.

THE GOOD EARTH

by PEARL S. BUCK

Author of
EAST WIND:
WEST WIND

"Remains the best novel
of the season."

— HARRY HANSEN



The Forge, a few years ago, was a favoring circumstance, but did not definitely influence our decision... Of *The Store*, may I be permitted to add, that I was in the South... during the time covered by this story, and in Mr. Stribling's work I find the loose chaos of social, moral and business conditions of that day, and of that unhappy hinterland realistically recalled."⁶⁴ Because, as Hohenberg illustrates, "there was little argument over the 1933 selection, *The Store*,"⁶⁵ in the end the Pulitzer Prize for 'best novel' was given to T. S. Stribling.⁶⁶

In 1934 the jury (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine) could not reach unanimity in its votes, and so it suggested "as its majority choice *A Watch in the Night*, by Helen C. White. The majority of the committee," the report continues, "considered as a close second *Lamb in His Bosom*, by Caroline Miller, and as a good third *No More Sea*, by Wilson Follett. *A Watch in the Night* is an historical novel of accurate background, sharply etched characters, and highly dramatic plot. Interest is sustained to the end from the collision of human motives and passions independent of the special issues historically involved."⁶⁷ That the decision of the jurors was not unanimous turned out to be a handicap, because the Advisory Board did not join in the vote for the book ranking first on the jury's list, but instead recommended to the Trustees that the Pulitzer Prize be awarded to Caroline Miller's *Lamb in His Bosom*.⁶⁸ And this is what finally came to pass.⁶⁹ "While the argument over the Pulitzers was on its height," as Hohenberg describes the situation, "Butler suggested that a public announcement should be drafted, curbing the authority of the juries. ... Fackenthal had no trouble in persuading the Fiction Jury to continue, even though the majority may not have liked being so rudely reversed. The identity of the minority member who carried the day for Caroline Miller was not revealed."⁷⁰

When the jurors (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine), then working together in that same make-up for years, discussed their favorites for 1935, they could not reach a unanimous vote in that year as well. "It seems impossible for your jury," it reads in their report to Fackenthal, "to agree this year on anything but that there is, in their opinion,

64 Albert B. Paine, Letter to Frank D. Fackenthal, Columbia University, New York, March 19, 1933, pp. 1 f.

65 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

66 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

67 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 17, 1934, p. 1.

68 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

69 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

70 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

no outstanding novel. Although their choice is by no means unanimous, they do, however, between them recommend to the consideration of the Board the following novels: "William W. Haines: *Slim...*; Ruth Suckow: *The Folks...*; Josephine Johnson: *Now in November...*; William R. Burnett: *Goodbye to the Past...*; Albert Halper: *The Foundry...*; Robert Cantwell: *Land of Plenty...*; Louis Dodge: *The American...*; Stark Young: *So red the rose...*"⁷¹ Hohenberg relates that the Advisory Board "chose Miss Johnson's novel but did not elaborate on the process by which it was selected. However, since Chairman Fletcher devoted more space to this work in his report and since his attitude toward it was more enthusiastic than the rest, it is obvious that he must have had some influence on the final choice. Moreover, it was not unknown for President Butler to consult jury chairmen when there were split verdicts."⁷² Thus the Pulitzer Prize went to Josephine Johnson for her work *Now in November*,⁷³ according to Hohenberg "a poetic first novel about a farm family in Middle America during the Depression."⁷⁴

For the Pulitzer Prize of 1936 the Plan of Award was changed once again, specifying that the award should henceforth go to "a distinguished novel published during the year by an American author, preferably dealing with American life."⁷⁵ "After having completed this write-through of the Plan of Award," Hohenberg states, "the Advisory Board awaited fresh and striking results from the Fiction Jury - a recommendation that would divert if not exactly halt the annual salvos of critical shellfire. The board had reason for hope, since 1935 had been a banner year for fiction. Among the 99 books submitted for the 1936 prize were Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and the River*, Humphrey Cobb's *Paths of Glory*, John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat*, and Ellen Glasgow's *Vein of Iron*. Not one of these, however, was among the first seven books that were recommended in order by the Fiction Jury."⁷⁶ For on the jury's list *Honey in the Horn*, by Harold L. Davis ranked first, followed by *This Body the Earth*, by Paul Green; *Time out of Mind*, by Rachel Field; *Ollie Miss*, by Lowell L. Balcom; *Deep Dark River*, by Robert Rylee; and *Blessed is the Man*, by Louis Zara.⁷⁷ The Board followed the advice of the jury and declared Harold L. Davis winner of the Pulitzer Prize for best

71 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 18, 1935, pp. 1 f.

72 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

73 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

74 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

75 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 138.

76 *Ibid.*

77 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 15, 1936, pp. 1 f.

novel,⁷⁸ all the while, as Hohenberg stresses, being perfectly aware "that criticism of the fiction award would continue. And it did."⁷⁹

In 1937 the jurors (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Robert M. Lovett and Albert B. Paine) decided to present a list of suggestions consisting of six titles which read as follows: *Gone With the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell; *The Last Puritan*, by George Santayana; *Three Bags Full*, by Roger Burlingame; *Mountain Path*, by Harriette Simpson; *Yang and Yin*, by Alice Tisdale Hobart; and *Drums along the Mohawk*, by Walter D. Edmond. "No comment on the first two novels seems called for," the jury wrote, adding: "Obviously, the Jury recommends them, not as best sellers but as deservedly best sellers."⁸⁰ "The Advisory Board, like the American public," as Hohenberg illuminates the decision-making process, "wasted no time in embracing Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, the endearing figures in the most popular and enduring of all Civil War romances. As usual, the critical buffeting of *Gone With the Wind* as a best-selling Pulitzer selection was strong and merciless but this time the hard-pressed Advisory Board was proved right... Whatever the critics may have thought of the book's sentiment and magnolia-scented romance, the public loved it... *Gone With the Wind* was an eminently defensible choice,"⁸¹ earning Margaret Mitchell the Pulitzer Prize

For the Pulitzer Prize Collection
of the Columbia University Library -
Margaret Mitchell
Atlanta, Ga.

Margaret Mitchell dedicates her award-winning book
to Columbia University

78 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

79 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

80 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Robert M. Lovett/Albert B. Paine, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 15, 1937, pp. 1 f.

81 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 f.

**GONE
WITH
the WIND**



by **MARGARET MITCHELL**

for 'best novel.'⁸² A few years later the film adaption was also honored by winning several Academy Awards.⁸³

The jury that went to work in the spring of 1938 (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Joseph W. Krutch and Robert M. Lovett) had one new member and agreed by majority vote "upon the following points: 1. That in its opinion *The Late George Apley* by John P. Marquand clearly deserves the award. 2. That if, for any reason, this recommendation should be rejected the two novels next most deserving of the honor are *The Sound of Running Feet* by Josephine Lawrence, and *Northwest Passage* by Kenneth Roberts. *The Late George Apley*," as the jury justified its first choice, "is a novel of unusual finish. Ostensibly, it is the 'authorized biography' of a distinguished Bostonian written by a professional compiler of biographies. Actually, Mr. Marquand uses the assumed personality of a biographer in order to picture ironically those traits of the subject's character which a contemporary would have admired but which appear in a different light to a later generation. The book is remarkable not only for the keenness of the satire but, almost equally, for the broad, sympathetic understanding exhibited by the author, who is able to present his personages from their own as well as from his point of view."⁸⁴ These arguments also convinced the Advisory Board and therefore the Pulitzer Prize for novel was given to John P. Marquand.⁸⁵

The jury of 1939 (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Joseph W. Krutch and Robert M. Lovett) also reached unanimously one clear proposal, after considering these five novels during its final discussion: *The Yearling*, by Marjorie Rawlings; *All This and Heaven Too*, by Rachel Field; *Black is My True Love's Hair*, by Elizabeth Madox Roberts; *May Flavin*, by Myron Birnig; and *Renown*, by Frank O. Hough. "The jury is... unanimously agreed," as it reads word for word in the jury-report "that its preference for *The Yearling* is sufficiently strong to justify it in expressing the hope that that novel will be selected." The novel by Marjorie Rawlings was considered "an interesting and sensitive account of the coming of age of a poor boy in a remote part of Florida. Remarkable both for its psychological insight and as a description of the life of a picturesque people."⁸⁶ This reasoning, according to Hohenberg, "won the Board's approval even though the critics grumbled. They

82 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

83 Cf. Richard Shale (Ed.), *Academy Awards*, New York 1978, pp. 334 ff.

84 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Joseph W. Krutch/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 11, 1938, p. 1.

85 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

86 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Joseph W. Krutch/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 13, 1939, p. 1.

wanted something new, raw, and tough. And in 1940, with war flaming in Europe and an apprehensive America sitting weak and divided between its broad oceans, they got it,"⁸⁷ after Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings had received the Pulitzer Prize the previous year.⁸⁸

The jurors of 1940 (Jefferson B. Fletcher, Joseph W. Krutch and Robert M. Lovett) made it perfectly clear in their report: "We are unanimously agreed to recommend as our first choice *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Despite the fact that it is marred by certain artistic blemishes, this novel has, we believe, excellences which make it the most powerful and significant of all the works submitted for our consideration." In addition to this novel the following books were also on the list of finalists: *Escape*, by Ethel Vance; *To the End of the World*, by Helen White; *Seasoned Timber*, by Dorothy Canfield; and *Night Riders*, by Robert Penn Warren.⁸⁹ "When the report was distributed to the Advisory Board," Hohenberg found out, "two of the members were outraged... Both wrote letters to try to influence their colleagues against *The Grapes of Wrath* in advance of the Advisory Board meeting of May 3, 1940... When the Board met,... the two objectors were in attendance, as was President Butler and all save one member who had been excused... In the end," Hohenberg continues, the two opponents were "unable to stop Steinbeck any more... When the award was voted by the university Trustees and made public, it was received with universal approval... The Pulitzer Prize served to confirm John Steinbeck's stature as a major American novelist,"⁹⁰ who more than two decades later was also to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.⁹¹

To the jury of 1941 (Dorothy C. Fisher, Jefferson B. Fletcher and Joseph W. Krutch), which partly consisted of new members, sifting through the submissions at hand 1941 seemed "at first like a rather easy and uncontroversial year," since a magazine had beforehand given the impression that the prize would go to Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Yet, as Hohenberg explains, "the Pulitzer jurors, however, didn't see it that way. They unanimously recommended two coequal fiction prizes for Conrad Richter's novel of American pioneer life, *The Trees*, and Walter V. Tilburgh Clark's rousing Western, *The Ox-Bow Incident*. They put down the Heming-

87 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

88 Columbia University (Ed.), *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

89 Jefferson B. Fletcher/Joseph W. Krutch/Robert M. Lovett, Report of the Pulitzer Prize Novel Jury, New York, March 15, 1940, p. 1.

90 John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142 f.

91 Cf. Werner Martin, *Verzeichnis der Nobelpreisträger 1901-1984*, München - New York - London - Paris 1985, p. 269.

THE
GRAPES of WRATH

John Steinbeck

