

# The Nation's Book Reviewers Nominate Their Pulitzer Prize Favorites

THIS is the fourth year *The Saturday Review* has asked the book reviewers of the nation's press to state their nominations for the annual Pulitzer Prize awards. In no year has there been such a wide margin of disagreement as in the present poll. Thirty-nine reviewers participate in the selections, but in only one classification—fiction—are they able to muster a bare majority in support of a particular title. In the categories of biography, history, and poetry, the leading titles fall short of anything resembling an overwhelming vote.

The outstanding book on the list, from the standpoint of vote totals, is Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls." Kenneth Roberts's "Oliver Wiswell" is runner-up, but the voting behind the leader is somewhat scattered. The only other title, in addition to "For Whom the Bell Tolls," to receive a clear margin of preference is Van Wyck Brooks's "New England: Indian Summer," in the history category. If the critics are right, and if their preference is duplicated by the Pulitzer Committee, this will mean Mr. Brooks's second award for his literature series. Similarly, it might mean the third time in three years that a work dealing with a literary or semi-literary subject would receive the history award. Mr. Brooks won the award in 1937 for the "Flowering of New England," while Frank Luther Mott won the award in 1939 for "The History of American Magazines."

Biography had a lean year in 1940. This is reflected not only in the sales figures for the year, but in the selections by the critics. In no other category were the votes so widely diffused over so large a number of titles. No fewer than seventeen titles figured in the balloting for this grouping. It may be too early to determine whether the biographical depression is the result of the exhaustion of front-line American figures as subjects, or whether the caesura is purely accidental or even incidental, but judging from the balloting of the critics, the Pulitzer Committee may find it difficult to make a clear-cut choice in this field. As it stands on the reviewers' list, an autobiography—"As I Remember Him," by Hans Zinsser—leads the list, with Allan Nevins's "John D. Rockefeller" in second place.

Perhaps nothing reflects the general uncertainty in this year's list as much as the number of ineligible books nominated for the award. In biography, the Pulitzer Committee excludes works

on George Washington and Abraham Lincoln from consideration as "too obvious" examples of patriotic and unselfish services to the American people, which is the basis for the award in this classification. Similarly, only American figures are eligible; yet several titles nominated by the reviewers went outside this requirement.

In poetry, no title managed to obtain more than three votes. Even so, only two books are tied for first place, with Conrad Aiken's "And in the Human Heart," and Alice Duer Miller's "The White Cliffs" as the favorites.

*The Saturday Review* conducts these polls each year not so much in an effort to anticipate the selections of the Pulitzer Committees, as to obtain a representative cross-section of critical opinion as to the worthy books in each of the four classifications. Thus far, the selections of the critics have corresponded fairly closely with those of the Pulitzer Committees. Last year, three of four titles heading the reviewers' lists were chosen by the Committee—John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," Carl Sandburg's "Abraham Lincoln," and Mark Van Doren's "Collected Poems." While the reviewers nominated Sandburg for the biography—despite the ineligibility clause standing in its way—the Committee selected it for the history award.

A summary of the tabulations follows. On the page opposite appear the choices of the individual reviewers.

## FICTION

TITLE, AUTHOR, AND PUBLISHER	NO. OF VOTES
FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS by Ernest Hemingway ( <i>Scribners</i> )	21
OLIVER WISWELL by Kenneth Roberts ( <i>Doubleday, Doran</i> )	6
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN by Thomas Wolfe ( <i>Harpers</i> )	4
SAPPHIRA AND THE SLAVE GIRL by Willa Cather ( <i>Knopf</i> )	2
FOUNDATION STONE by Leila Warren ( <i>Knopf</i> )	2
NATIVE SON by Richard Wright ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
THE SILENT DRUM by Neil Swanson ( <i>Farrar &amp; Rinehart</i> )	1
OH PROMISED LAND by James Street ( <i>Dial</i> )	1
THE TREES by Conrad Richter ( <i>Knopf</i> )	1

## BIOGRAPHY

TITLE, AUTHOR, AND PUBLISHER	NO. OF VOTES
AS I REMEMBER HIM by Hans Zinsser ( <i>Little, Brown</i> )	9
JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER by Allan Nevins ( <i>Scribners</i> )	4
AUDUBON'S AMERICA by Donald Culross Peattie ( <i>Houghton Mifflin</i> )	2
A MAN NAMED GRANT by Helen Todd ( <i>Houghton Mifflin</i> )	2
GEORGE WASHINGTON by Nathaniel Stephenson and Waldo Dunn ( <i>Oxford</i> )	2
TRELAWNY by Margaret Armstrong ( <i>Macmillan</i> )	2
SHELLEY by Newman Ivey White ( <i>Knopf</i> )	2

HAPPY DAYS by H. L. Mencken ( <i>Knopf</i> )	2
AMBASSADOR DODD'S DIARY ed. by William E. Dodd, Jr. and Martha Dodd ( <i>Harcourt, Brace</i> )	1
THE BRIDGE by Ernest Poole ( <i>Macmillan</i> )	1
A SURGEON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY by Hugh Young ( <i>Harcourt, Brace</i> )	1
A VICTORIAN REBEL by Lloyd Eshleman ( <i>Scribners</i> )	1
THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN ed. by Philip Van Doren Stern ( <i>Random House</i> )	1
I RODE WITH STONEWALL by Henry Kyd Douglas ( <i>Univ. of N. C.</i> )	1
MR. PITT AND AMERICA'S BIRTHRIGHT by J. C. Long ( <i>Stokes</i> )	1
IF YOU DON'T WEAKEN by Oscar Ameringer ( <i>Holt</i> )	1
FORTY YEARS A COUNTRY PREACHER by George B. Gilbert ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
COUNTRY EDITOR by Henry B. Hough ( <i>Doubleday, Doran</i> )	1

## HISTORY

TITLE, AUTHOR, AND PUBLISHER	NO. OF VOTES
NEW ENGLAND: INDIAN SUMMER by Van Wyck Brooks ( <i>Dutton</i> )	16
DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN HISTORY ed. by James Truslow Adams ( <i>Scribners</i> )	2
THE PRESIDENT MAKERS, by Matthew Josephson ( <i>Harcourt, Brace</i> )	2
I RODE WITH STONEWALL by Henry Kyd Douglas ( <i>Univ. of N. C.</i> )	2
WASHINGTON AND THE REVOLUTION by Bernhard Knollenberg ( <i>Macmillan</i> )	1
THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM by Louis Hacker ( <i>Simon &amp; Schuster</i> )	1
THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN ed. by Philip Van Doren Stern ( <i>Random House</i> )	1
THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY by Harold J. Laski ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
THE AMERICAN PRIMER by Dorsha Hayes ( <i>Alliance</i> )	1
AP: THE STORY OF NEWS by Oliver Gramling ( <i>Farrar &amp; Rinehart</i> )	1
THE COURSE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT by Ralph H. Gabriel ( <i>Ronald</i> )	1
THE DELAWARE by H. E. Wildes ( <i>Farrar &amp; Rinehart</i> )	1
AUDUBON'S AMERICA by Donald Culross Peattie ( <i>Houghton Mifflin</i> )	1
JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER by Allan Nevins ( <i>Scribners</i> )	1
THE FIRST GENTLEMAN OF VIRGINIA by Louis B. Wright ( <i>Huntington Library</i> )	1

## POETRY

TITLE, AUTHOR, AND PUBLISHER	NO. OF VOTES
AND IN THE HUMAN HEART by Conrad Aiken ( <i>Duell, Sloan &amp; Pearce</i> )	3
THE WHITE CLIFFS by Alice Duer Miller ( <i>Putnams</i> )	3
COLLECTED POEMS by Kenneth Fearing ( <i>Random House</i> )	2
THE FACE IS FAMILIAR by Ogden Nash ( <i>Little, Brown</i> )	2
A WINTER TIDE by Robert Nathan ( <i>Knopf</i> )	2
COLLECTED POEMS by Edward Davison ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS by Edna St. Vincent Millay ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
PATTERN OF A DAY by Robert Hillyer ( <i>Knopf</i> )	1
COLLECTED POEMS by Jean Starr Untermeyer ( <i>Viking</i> )	1
DEATH AT SEA by Frederic Prokosch ( <i>Harpers</i> )	1
COLLECTED POEMS by Robinson Jeffers ( <i>Random House</i> )	1
WITH WINGS AS EAGLES by William Rose Benét ( <i>Dodd, Mead</i> )	1
THE ARROW AT THE HEEL by Raymond Holden ( <i>Holt</i> )	1
SONG IN THE MEADOW by Elizabeth Madox Roberts ( <i>Viking</i> )	1

# Eight American Novelists

*AMERICAN FICTION, 1920-1940.* By Joseph Warren Beach. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1941. 371 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

MR. BEACH'S latest volume is an amiable exercise in academic criticism. I use the words "amiable" and "academic" without patronage but as expressing both a certain strength and a certain limitation. I call his book amiable because it is a friendly explication of the purpose and artistic methods of eight American novelists, the explication being primarily directed at a reader of conventional tastes likely to be shocked or irritated by the subject-matter and the methods of Messrs. Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Wolfe, Caldwell, Farrell, Marquand, and Steinbeck. That such readers exist by the legion is an obvious fact; these readers Mr. Beach seeks to convert to a greater apprehension of what the eight are driving at. And I call his book academic because the manner is often the classroom manner. Things are made clear after the fashion of a good college lecture. Labels are applied, tendencies indicated, and the reader of the volume puts it down with a considerable sense of satisfaction because he feels that the curve of contemporary fiction has been clearly plotted for him.

To be sure, both amiability and academicism have their weaknesses. For example, it is an unfortunate instance of the classroom manner to have Mr. Beach interpolate on page 5: "I go to the movies a good deal myself and have no apologies to make for that way of passing an evening. It is a form of relaxation as salutary for the tired scholar as for the tired businessman. Besides, the movies offer certain artistic features not present in the trashy novel." There is a whole paragraph in the style of Mr. William Lyon Phelps, and though it may endear Mr. Beach to a certain order of readers, it can only damn him among another order of readers, for whom the critical problem of the esthetics of fiction is paramount and Mr. Beach's affability about Hollywood is a mere annoyance. And Mr. Beach's amiability is such that, though he skillfully ranks the novels of his various authors into classes and kinds of perfection or imperfection, no writer is seriously condemned. Even Mr. Marquand's Mr. Moto books, which are potboilers, receive an approving nod.

This tone of condescension is fortunately not characteristic of Mr.

Beach's general critical style, but it appears often enough to vitiate his criticism at unexpected moments. For example, he writes, it seems to me, very well, when he says of these eight novelists that "in the long run they impress one as deeply and humanly concerned that men should attain to the spiritual dignity of which they are potentially capable, and that the social forms which embody and determine relations among men should better reflect the ideals of democratic justice to which in this country we all pay at least lip service."

I say Mr. Beach writes very well, but I must immediately modify this statement. He writes well when, seeing beneath the surface of Caldwell and Faulkner and the rest, he perceives that they are deeply and humanly concerned about the spiritual dignity of man. But he does not write well in the last part of the sentence—the part about the ideals of democratic justice—because at this point Mr. Beach turns away from his critical problems to humor the taste of his audience. And the weakness of academic criticism seem to me to lie just here; namely, that the academic critic, however acute his insight, cannot forget that he has an audience. He is not satisfied to point out good work. He does not see the work of art in itself as it truly is, he sees the work of art as something demanding pedagogical explication. But pedagogical explication implies that the explication is being conducted for the benefit of the less well informed. Under these circumstances literary criticism is not itself a work of art, it is a form of teaching.

Mr. Beach assuredly teaches. He teaches wisely and well, barring a few unfortunate lapses. Nobody who reads his book but must rise up from it edified, in the old-fashioned sense of the word. His criticism strengthens and improves. It profits us spiritually and mentally. It ought to increase the reading public for the eight authors Mr. Beach has chosen to talk about. He makes us aware of technical devices, of over-layers of meaning, of

special moral and social significances in fiction which most of us read, as we say, for the story. I admire the job. But I venture to add the blasphemy that he does not greatly advance the art of criticism or enrich the art of the novel.

What I am trying to do is not to find fault with Mr. Beach but to define him and to define a whole manner of writing about the art of literature. It is a manner which is often misunderstood and depreciated, especially by a certain type of writer, who describes it as "academic" in the sense of inept. But this is not true. Mr. Beach is not inept, academic criticism is not inept, the business of pedagogical explication, rightly done, is not inept, it is simply a necessary job of teaching. I do not say that without it the literary audience would not exist, but I do say that because of it the literary audience is widened. Its function is the function of college English departments and of adult education. But there is no use pretending, it seems to me, that literary explication of this sort is the same thing as literary criticism is rightly considered.

Mr. Beach has gone forth on a crusade. He wants eight novelists of disillusion better known. He understands that the violences which they commit offend many readers, and he therefore wishes to palliate or explain away their brutalities. But if Mr. Beach had included Ellen Glasgow in his list? If Mr. Beach had said something about Willa Cather? If Mr. Beach had remarked the strength and the weakness of Robert Nathan? Mr. Beach was under no obligation to do so—in fact, makes a charming apology for his choices, but my point is not that I wish to force Mr. Beach into a corner or to demand of him that he write not this book but some other one, my point is that his choices are those of a man who wants to explain something imperfectly understood, not the choices of a man whose primary concern is for the craft of fiction, the art of the novel, or the esthetic problem which confronts the literary workman.

His criticism is therefore criticism of the second class, not criticism of the first class—criticism which, in a perfectly decent sense of the word, is derivative rather than primary. And because much of what is written about contemporary literature is of the same persuasion—hortatory, explicatory, edifying (even when it pretends not to edify)—American criticism, wonderfully as it has developed in the twentieth century, has a long way to go before it achieves a true independence.

Howard Mumford Jones is Professor of English at Harvard University.

