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Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Grapes of Wrath" ed. by Robert Con Davis (review)

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and reader by merely opening a door to what the reader unconsciously knows.

Only rarely does a writer gain such acceptance. But when he does, if only once in a lifetime of prolific work, he is amply rewarded. He can be humbly grateful for having been permitted to speak in a language of the heart understood by many of his unknown and sometimes distant fellowmen.

In several different ways, Tanner's bibliography brings a reader closer to Frank Waters.

Incidentally, through the process of researching and compiling this monumental volume, Tanner forces many of us to give up one of our favorite illusions — namely, that Scholarship resides solely in the halls of Academe. Tanner is primarily a business man, an antiquarian book-dealer, with offices in Chicago, Illinois. And, in this case, no university gets credit for encouraging or supporting his labors. Indeed, most of the work for the bibliography was accomplished in his basement study in his home in Skokie, Illinois, after the rigors of the usual eight-to-five day.

The product of this labor, however, with all due respect to other Frank Waters scholars, is the finest piece of Waters scholarship yet published. And it is likely to remain the "high water mark" for quite a few years to come. It is a scholarly tool, of the first order. It will prove invaluable, not only to book dealers and investors, but to students, teachers, and scholars, and to general readers interested in Frank Waters' work.

CHARLES L. ADAMS

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Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Grapes of Wrath." Edited by Robert Con Davis. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982. 157 pages.)

At first glance, it is difficult to know what to make of Robert Con Davis' collection of critical essays on John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. So much has been written and rewritten, published and republished on Steinbeck's greatest novel during the past two decades, that one must ask why Prentice-Hall included it in its series of *Twentieth Century Interpretations*. All but one of the dozen essays in the volume have appeared elsewhere, and many (particularly those by Peter Lisca, Warren French, Edwin Bowden and George Bluestone) are well known to serious students of Steinbeck's fiction. Omitted are equally important but lesser-known essays, most noteworthy among them the recent work of Jackson Benson, whose articles on Tom Collins and the historical background of *The Grapes of Wrath* shed more light on the novel than many of the essays included in the book.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Davis' volume is still valuable. In the Introduction, Davis suggests that he wants to teach students of modern literature how to read Steinbeck. He indicates that contemporary readers "with a grasp of Richard Brautigan, Hunter S. Thompson, and Thomas Pynchon are

not necessarily prepared to read *The Grapes of Wrath*." (p. 1) Davis points the way for readers "to retrieve the sensibility" for reading well a novel which "though recently a work of contemporary fiction — stands now, we must recall, in the middle distance of American literary history" (pp. 1-2) since it runs counter to the main development in recent literature — modernist fiction.

Appropriately, many of the pieces in Davis' volume deal with the novel's structure. Davis does not include any of those early articles (for example, by Joseph Warren Beach, Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson or Joseph Henry Jackson) which view *The Grapes of Wrath* primarily as a social document. And perhaps this is why Benson's recent work is also excluded. Instead, the essays in the book focus on issues dealing with such matters as narrative voice, the interweaving of microcosm and macrocosm (the Joad story and the inter-chapters) and with the novel as a development of epic, biblical and mythic traditions in American literature.

This is not to say that Davis wants to convince us that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a modernist novel. Rather, we find that the book is, as Edwin Bowden tells us in "The Commonplace and The Grotesque," still clearly in the tradition of the "American concern in fiction for the problem of isolation." (p. 22) And we see that Steinbeck's solution to this problem — the loss of self in concern for others, the idea of "group-man" embodied in the Joad's realization that self-fulfillment comes through commitment to the community of all men and women (what Warren French calls "the education of the heart") is simply a modern version of our continuing romantic tradition in fiction.

One comes away from Davis' volume affirming or reaffirming that *The Grapes of Wrath* is, both structurally and thematically, a complex, masterfully written novel that we are only slowly learning to read well. Perhaps this is because it appears to offer few critical problems. Its form is not innovative by modern standards, and it does not demand great scholarly erudition of its readers. More importantly, it forces us "to feel" — something which in our current adoration for method and technique we are losing the ability to do. The central values in Steinbeck's novel are emotional, not cerebral. And, *The Grapes of Wrath* is not at all a period piece about a troubled time long past, but a novel which, as Peter Lisca so accurately notes, we can continue to read with "a sense of emotional involvement and aesthetic discovery." (p. 48)

RICHARD ASTRO, *Northeastern University*

The Sea Runners. By Ivan Doig (New York: Atheneum, 1982. 279 pages, \$13.95.)

In Mr. Doig's second book, *Winter Brothers*, his spiritual ancestor James Gilchrist Swan reached his most glorious moment at an age when most men are content to sit by a golden pond: he explored by canoe the uncharted western coast of Graham Island in the Queen Charlottes, and became for Mr. Doig an archetype, the "western venturer . . . the history-bearer." A journey in many ways like that one is the subject of this first Doig novel, and the meticulous research, the attention to rendering minute and faithful "reality," and the author's excitement for the quest found in *Winter Brothers* are here