Current Comments

The 100 Most-Cited Authors of 20th Century Literature. Can Citation Data Forecast the Nobel Prize in Literature?

Number 4

January 28, 1980

William Butler Yeats won the Nobel prize in literature in 1923 for "his always inspiring poetry, which in a highly artistic form, gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation."¹ Thomas Mann, in 1929, was awarded the prize "principally for his great novel, *Buddenbrooks*, which has won steadily increased recognition as one of the classic works of contemporary literature."¹ Samuel Beckett received the prize in 1969 for his new forms of the novel and of drama.²

These three authors, along with four other Nobel prize winners for literature, appeared on the list of most-cited arts and humanities authors we published last year.³ That list was based on citation data for 1977 and 1978, compiled from the data base we use to create the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*TM (A&HCITM). The list contained authors from other areas of the arts and humanities. However, authors of literature seemed disproportionately represented.

Most of you are familiar with my frequent assertions about the value of citation analysis in measuring the impact of scientific work.⁴ There is little doubt that unusual citedness is often found among the winners of the Nobel prizes in science.⁵ But what may be true for science is not necessarily the case in the arts. Are the winners of the Nobel prize in literature also heavily cited? Put another way—do the selections of the Nobel committees correspond to the people who are most often cited in the scholarly literature about literature?

The Nobel prize in literature is awarded annually by the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. The Swedish Academy closely resembles the French and Spanish Academies. Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, was a prolific reader as well as an aspiring author. So it is not surprising that he established an award for literature along with prizes in physics, chemistry, and medicine. He also established the well-known Nobel peace prize. The first prizes were awarded in $1901.^2$

Today, the members of the Swedish Academy-18 writers, elected for life-judge literature nominations submitted by government leaders, prominent scholars, former prize winners, and fellow Academy members.¹ Any person who nominates himself or herself is automatically eliminated from consideration. For purposes of the award, the Swedish Academy defines literature as not only "belles lettres, but also other writings, which, by virtue of their contents and form, possess literary value."6 This sweeping definition has allowed the Academy to choose philosophers and historians as winners of the award along with novelists, poets, and playwrights.

The Nobel prize in literature has often been surrounded by criticism and debate. Part of the reason for this stems from the wording of Alfred Nobel's will. In it, he specifically stated that the award was to be given "to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work of an idealistic tendency."² (p. 9) Most literary critics would agree that not all great literature is of "an idealistic tendency." Nevertheless, the judges of the awards, especially during the early years, felt constrained by Nobel's directive. Thus, in 1903 (the third year of the prize) playwright Henrik Ibsen was nominated but passed over for the prize by the Academy because the members felt his works lacked idealism. That year Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson of Norway, a favorite of Nobel's while he lived, won the prize for poetry.¹

Controversy surrounds the awards for other reasons as well. Some critics claim that the awards are sometimes politically motivated and that authors are given the awards more for their personal ideologies than for the literary merit of their works. For example, when the French author Romain Rolland received the prize in 1915, his detractors alleged that Rolland was honored more for his pacifism than for the novels he wrote.^{1,7}

Critics also charge that certain authors who should have won the award did not for political reasons. For example, the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoi was passed over by the Swedish Academy in favor of less illustrious candidates. The traditional anti-Russian bias of the Swedish government is blamed for this slight. Tolstoi's name was presented to the Academy for nine consecutive years.⁷

In his will, Nobel stated that authors of all nationalities should be considered for the award, not only Scandinavians. Following this wish, the Nobel judges have tried to honor authors from all over the world. Sometimes this has resulted in the selection of relatively obscure authors. For example, in 1913, Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian who wrote lyric verse in Bengali, won the prize. Obviously, not too many people outside of India were familiar with his work.¹ In 1979, Greek lyric poet Odysseus Elytis won the prize. Although Elytis is known outside of Greece, he is certainly not as wellknown as many other living poets or writers.⁸ Both of these authors' works were judged in translation, as were the works of others.

While the Academy has granted the prize to many relatively unknown

authors, most of them were deserving, even in the opinion of literary scholars. Figure 1 shows the list of Nobel prize winners in literature, along with the number of articles that cited them in the A&HCI, 1977-78.

At this point I must note that the data base on which this study was based has a distinct Anglo-American bias. We expect that bias to change somewhat in the future. We are now in the process of expanding our coverage in A&HCI. We will be adding more journals from many non-English speaking countries. Some of the Nobel prize winners' citation counts in Figure 1 might be higher if we covered more journals from their own countries. Nevertheless, some internationally known prize winners-Thomas Mann of Germany, Jean-Paul Sartre of France, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn of the USSR-are well-cited, despite our bias. Indeed, it is often the case that famous literary figures are heroes abroad and taken for granted at home.

In order to study the relationship between citation data and the Nobel prize, we compiled a list of the 50 most-cited authors of 20th century literature. This was derived from the larger list of authors cited in the A&HCI 1977-78.3 Figure 2 lists the names of authors who were eligible to receive the Nobel prize during their lifetimes and whether they did so or not, an important consideration because Nobel prizes are awarded only to living authors. The only exception to this rule is if the author died between the time of nomination and the time the award was announced. Authors are listed in citation rank order with a description of their work and country of residence. Those authors who were awarded the Nobel prize are indicated along with the date the prize was given. Note that all authors listed were cited by at least 55 articles. This is low if you consider the higher figure usually associated with scientists.

Fifteen of the 50 authors on the list won the Nobel prize, although one, Sartre, declined to accept it. This is a very large percentage. In a study of the 50 most-cited scientists for 1967 only six Figure 1: Winners of the Nobel prize in literature, by year of prize. Their nationalities and the number of articles that cited them in the Arts & Humanities Citation Index[™] (A&HCI[™]) 1977-78 are indicated. As a point of reference, the most-cited author in the A&HCI 1977-78, Karl Marx, was cited in 704 articles. William Shakespeare, the most-cited literary figure, was cited in 594 articles. (A = Year of prize; B = Name; C = Nationality; D = Number of citing articles 1977-78)

A	В	с	D	A	В	С	D
1901	Sully Prudhomme	(F)	3	1944	Johannes V. Jensen	(D)	1
1902	Theodor Mommsen	(G)	45	1945	Gabriela Mistral	(CHILE)	2
1903	Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson	(N)	1	1946	Hermann Hesse	(SWI)	27
1904	Frédéric Mistral	(F)	7	1947	André Gide	(F)	92
	Jose Echegaray	(SP)	_	1948	T.S. Eliot	(GB)	287
1905	Henryk Sienkiewicz	(POL)	4	1949	William Faulkner	(US)	95
1906	Giosue Carducci	(I)	19	1950	Bertrand Russell	(GB)	213
1907	Rudyard Kipling	(GB)	23	1951	Pår Lagerkvist	(SWE)	8
1908	Rudolf Eucken	(G)		1952	François Mauriac	(F)	17
1909	Selma Lagerlöf	(SWE)	1	1953	Winston Churchill	(GB)	41
1910	Paul Heyse	(G)	3	1954	Ernest Hemingway	(US)	78
1911	Maurice Maeterlinck	(B)	15	1955	Halldor Laxness	(IC)	2
1912	Gerhart Hauptmann	(G)	9	1956	J.R. Jiménez	(SP)	6
1913	Rabindranath Tagore	(IN)	7	1957	Albert Camus	(F)	113
1915	Romain Rolland	(F)	14	1958	Boris Pasternak	(USSR)	20
1916	Verner V. Heidenstam	(SWE)	_	1959	Salvatore Quasimodo	(I)	4
1917	Karl Gjellerup	(D)	_	1960	Saint-John Perse	(F)	7
	Henrik Pontoppidan	(D)	1	1961	Ivo Andrić	(Y)	6
1919	Carl Spitteler	(SWI)	2	1962	John Steinbeck	(US)	55
1920	Knut Hamsun	(N)	1	1963	Giorgos Seferis	(GREECE)	3
1921	Anatole France	(F)	19	1964	Jean-Paul Sartre	(F)	319
1922	Jacinto Benavente	(SP)	2	1965	Mikhail A. Sjolochov	(USSR)	8
1923	William Butler Yeats	(IR)	171	1966	Shmuel Y. Agnon	(IS)	7
1924	Wladyslaw Reymont	(POL)	1		Nelly Sachs	(G)	3
1925	George Bernard Shaw	(GB)	142	1967	Miguel Angel Asturias	(GUAT)	18
1926	Grazia Deledda	(I)	-	1968	Yasunari Kawabata	(J)	6
1927	Henri Bergson	(F)	76	1969	Samuel Beckett	(IR)	127
1928	Sigrid Undset	(N)	1	1970	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	(USSR)	66
1929	Thomas Mann	(G)	128	1971	Pablo Neruda	(CH)	33
1930	Sinclair Lewis	(US)	32	1972	Heinrich Böll	(G)	30
1931	Erik Karlfeldt	(SWE)	-	1973	Patrick White	(AUSTR)	48
1932	John Galsworthy	(GB)	19	1974	Eyvind Johnson	(SWE)	2
1933	Ivan Bunin	(FR)	3		Harry Martinson	(SWE)	1
1934	Luigi Pirandello	(I)	35	1975	Eugenio Montale	(I)	49
1936	Eugene O'Neill	(US)	31	1976	Saul Bellow	(US)	54
1937	Roger Martin du Gard	(F)	5	1977	Vicente Aleixandre	(SP)	12
1938	Pearl Buck	(US)	6	1978	Isaac Bashevis Singer	(US)	14
1939	F.E. Sillanpää	(FI)	_	1979	Odysseus Elytis	(GREECE)	—
	-		•				

had then received the prize.^{9,10} Subsequently, many more of them did.

As you can see, the authors who appear on our list are illustrious. James Joyce, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf, to name a few, are all well-known and highly esteemed authors. That they were not chosen for the Nobel prize in literature during their lifetimes in no way diminishes their value to literary scholarship. Many of the non-winners listed here have been nominated at one time or another. In fact, overlooking them is one of the ma-

CURRENT CONTENTS® © 1980 by ISI ® jor criticisms of the Nobel committee. And as Isaac Bashevis Singer, the 1978 Nobel laureate, recently noted, "Many great writers didn't win the prize, and they are still great writers."¹¹

The list also contains the names of several highly-cited authors who are still alive, and thus eligible to win the prize. One of these is Jorge Luis Borges, the great Argentinian short story writer and poet. Considered by many critics the greatest living writer in Spanish, Borges is now 81 years old. His work, *Ficciones*. brought him the grand prize of Figure 2: Fifty most-cited authors of literature who are or were eligible for the Nobel prize. Birthdate, description of work, nationality of each author, and the number of articles citing the author are listed. Nobel prize winners are indicated. Authors still eligible to win the prize are indicated by an asterisk. (A = Name; B = Description of work; C = Number of citing articles; <math>D = Year of Nobel)

	•	P	C	D
1.	A Sartre, Jean-Paul (b. 1905)	B French novelist, playwright, critic, &	C 319	1964
1.	ourne, seun rudi (o. 1763)	philosopher		1,701
2.	Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888-1965)	British poet & critic, born in US	287	1948
3.	Joyce, James (1882-1941)	Irish novelist	261	
4.	James, Henry (1843-1916)	British novelist, born in US	225	1050
5.	Russell, Bertrand (1872-1970)	British mathematician & philosopher	213	1950
6.	Lawrence, David Herbert (1885-1930)	British novelist & poet	188	
7.	Yeats, William Butler (1865-1939)	Irish poet & playwright	171	1923
8.		Argentine short fiction writer & poet	151	•
9.•	Woolf, Virginia (1882-1941)	British novelist & critic	148	
10.	Shaw, George Bernard (1856-1950)	British playwright, essayist, & critic - born in Ireland	142	1925
11.	Mann, Thomas (1875-1955)	German novelist	128	1929
12.	Conrad, Joseph (Teodor Josef	British novelist, born in Poland	127	
	Konrad Korzeniowski) (1857-1924)			
13.		Irish novelist & playwright	127	1969
14.	Brecht, Bertolt (1898-1956) Pound, Ezra (1885-1972)	German playwright	122	
15. 16.		American poet & critic French poet & critic	119	
17.		French novelist, playwright, & essayist,		1957
		born in Algeria		
18.	b	American novelist	107	
	(Mark Twain) (1835-1910)	The second s		
	Forster, Edward Morgan (1878-1970)	British novelist	98 98	
20.	Proust, Marcel (1871-1922) Auden, Wystan Hugh (1907-1973)	French novelist	90	
	Faulkner, William (1897-1962)	American poet, born in England American novelist	95	1949
	Kafka, Franz (1883-1924)	Austrian novelist & short fiction writer, born in Czechoslovakia	95	1,4,
24.	Tolstoi, Leo N. (1828-1910)	Russian novelist	94	
	Gide, Andre (1869-1951)	French novelist, playwright, & critic	92	1947
26.	Breton, Andre (1896-1966)	French poet	87	
	Zola, Émile (1840-1902)	French novelist	83 79	
	Huxley, Aldous Leonard (1894-1963) Stevens, Wallace (1879-1955)	English novelist	79 78	
	Hemingway, Ernest (1899-1961)	American poet American novelist & short fiction writer	78	1954
	Paz, Octavio (b. 1914)	Mexican poet, critic, & essayist	78	•
	Robbe-Grillet, Alain (b. 1922)	French novelis! & essayist	77	•
	Bergson, Henri (1859-1941)	French philosopher	76	1927
	Hardy, Thomas (1840-1928)	British novelist & poet	73	
	Williams, William Carlos (1883-1963)	American poet, novelist, & short fiction writer	69	
	Lewis, Sinclair (1885-1951)	American novelist	66	1930
	Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. (b. 1918) Nabulutte, Vladimia (1800–1077)	Russian novelist	66	1970
	Nabokov, Vladimir (1899-1977)	American novelist, poet, & short fiction writer, born in Russia	65	
	Orwell, George (Eric A. Blair) (1903-1950)	British novelist & critic	63	
	Howells, William Dean (1837-1920) Malraux, Andre (1901-1976)	American novelist & critic French novelist	61 58	
	Miller, Henry (b. 1891)	American novelist	.10	•
43	Apollinaire, Guillaume (1880-1918)	French poet & critic	57	
44.	Stein, Gertrude (1874-1946)	American author	57	
	Gardner, John (b. 1933)	American novelist, poet. & short fiction writer	56	•
46.	Graves, Robert (b. 1895)	British novelist, poet, & critic	56	•
	Warren, Robert Penn (b. 1905)	American poet & novelist	56	•
	Ibsen, Henrik (1828-1906)	Norwegian playwright	55	
	Lowell, Robert (1917-1977) Steinbeck, John (1902-1968)	American poet American novelist	55 55	1962
.90.	STEILUECK, JUILI (1902-1908)	American novensi		1702

*Still eligible

CURRENT CONTENTS® © 1980 by ISI @ the Argentine Writers' Association in 1946. Borges was a prolific writer during his younger years but now he asserts that his greatest work is behind him.¹² (p. 186-9)

Another writer who appears on our list and is still eligible for the prize is Octavio Paz of Mexico. Paz is known as a poet, critic, and essayist. His collected essays, *Alternating Current*, cover a wide range of topics from Oriental thought to third world politics. Paz's most famous poem, "Piedra de Sol," was described by at least one critic as "one of the most important poems to be published in the Western world."¹² (p. 1112-4)

The French novelist, screenwriter, and essayist Alain Robbe-Grillet is also on the list. Robbe-Grillet is known as an advocate of the nouveau roman (new novel), a literary form described as "what is left when the writer has swept away all of the delusions and dishonesties which encumber the traditional novel."¹² (p. 1219-21) His best known works include The Erasers, The Voyeur, Jealousy, and In the Labyrinth, all "new novels."

Henry Miller, the American novelist, provoked much controversy with *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. These books are known to the public because of the use of explicit sexual language. Not surprisingly, his work is highly cited.¹³ (p. 410-12) Another author on the list is Robert Penn Warren, who was once poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. Warren has won the Pulitzer prize in both fiction and poetry. Most critics consider *All the King's Men* to be his masterpiece.¹³ (p. 489-90)

Also on the list are Robert Graves, of *I. Claudius* fame and John Gardner, whose *Grendel* was named one of 1971's best fiction books by *Time* and *News*week.

To be taken seriously by literary scholars, an author usually must have demonstrated his ability to compile a corpus of worthy work. Literary scholars tend to be rather conservative and more often cite the work of older authors who have "proven" themselves rather than younger, newer talent. Three of the living authors on the list (who have not yet won the Nobel)— Miller, Graves, and Borges — are in their 80s. Warren is 75 and Paz is 66. Robbe-Grillet and Gardner are the youngest at 58 and 47, respectively. Scholarly conservatism has its parallel in the conservative views of the Swedish Academy. The majority of the recipients of the Nobel to date have been older than 50 years of age.¹

In Figure 3 we have compiled a list of the next 50 most-cited authors of literature. Eight of these authors have won Nobel prizes. Generally speaking, the writers on this list are younger than the writers listed in Figure 2. Peter Handke (*The Left-Handed Woman*) is the youngest at 38. Seven more are in their 40s: Mario Vargas Llosa (*Conver*sation in the Cathedral); Margaret Atwood (*The Edible Woman*); Joyce Carol Oates (*Them*); John Updike (*Rabbit*, *Run*); Thomas Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*); and Jerzy Kosinski (*The Painted Bird*).

The majority of the authors in Figure 3 who are living are 50 years old or over. Ted Hughes (Lupercal); Carlos Fuentes (Terra Nostra); Gabriel García Márquez (One Hundred Years of Solitude); Harold Pinter (The Homecoming); John Barth (End of the Road); James Baldwin (Go Tell It on the Mountain); Italo Calvino (Cosmicomics); and Norman Mailer (The Naked and the Dead) are all in their 50s. Iris Murdoch (An Accidental Man); Julio Cortázar (Hopscotch); Burgess (A Clockwork Anthony Orange); Ralph Ellison (The Invisible Man); Eugène Ionesco (The Bald Soprano); and Doris Lessing (The Grass is Singing) are in their 60s. Three of the authors are in their 70s: Graham Greene (The Power and the Glory); Stephen Spender (The Edge of Being); and Simone de Beauvoir (Prime of Life).

Fifteen of the American authors who appear in these two lists have won the Pulitzer prize, administered by Columbia University. They include Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, John Steinbeck, Figure 3: The next 50 most-cited authors of literature who are or were eligible for the Nobel prize. Birthdate, description of work, nationality of each author, and the number of articles citing the author are listed. Nobel prize winners are indicated. Authors still eligible to win the prize are indicated by an asterisk.(A = Name; B = Description of work; C = Number of citing articles; <math>D = Year of Nobel)

	Α	В	с	D
51.	Bellow, Saul (b. 1915)	American novelist	-54	1976
52.	Mailer, Norman (b. 1923)	American novelist	52	•
53.	Rilke, Rainer Maria (1875-1926)	Austrian poet	52	
	Fitzgerald, F. Scott (1896-1940)	American short fiction writer & novelist	51	
	Hofmannsthal, Hugo von (1874-1929)	Austrian playwright, poet, & essayist	42	
	Vargas Llosa, Mario (b. 1936)	Peruvian novelist	50	•
	Atwood, Margaret (b. 1939)	Canadian poet & novelist	49	•
	Hughes, Ted (b. 1930)	British poet	49	·
	Beauvoir, Simone de (b. 1908)	French novelist	48	•
	Berryman, John (1914-1972) Eventus, Carlus (h. 1920)	American poet	48 47	•
	Fuentes, Carlos (b. 1929) Murdoch, Irís (b. 1919)	Mexican novelist, playwright, & critic British novelist	47	
	Dreiser, Theodore (1871-1945)	American novelist	46	
	Cortazar, Julio (b. 1914)	Argentine novelist & short fiction writer	45	
	García Marquez, Gabriel (b. 1928)	Colombian novelist	45	•
	Wright, Richard (1908-1960)	American novelist & short fiction writer	45	
	Burgess, Anthony	British novelist & critic	44	•
	(John Burgess Wilson) (b. 1917)			
68.	Nin, Anais (1903-1977)	American novelist, born in France	44	
69.	Greene, Graham (b. 1904)	British novelist, short fiction writer,	43	•
		& playwright		
- 70.	O'Casey, Sean (1884-1964)	Irish playwright	43	
71.	Barth, John (b. 1930)	American novelist & short fiction writer	41	·
72.	Handke, Peter (b. 1942)	Austrian playwright, novelist, & short fiction	41	•
		writer		
	Oates, Joyce Carol (b. 1938)	American novelist, short fiction writer, & poet	40	•
	Frost, Robert (1874-1963)	American poet	.39	
75.	Hughes, Langston (1902-1967)	American poet, short fiction writer, novelist, & playwright	.39	
76	Spender, Stephen (b. 1909)	British poet	39	
	White, Patrick (b. 1912)	Australian novelist & playwright	39	1973
	Baldwin, James (b. 1924)	American novelist, essayist, & playwright	39	•
	Pinter, Harold (b. 1930)	British playwright	38	
	Santayana, George (1863-1952)	American philosopher & poet, born in Spain	37	
	Pirandello, Luigi (1867-1936)	Italian playwright, novelist, & short fiction	35	1934
		writer		
82.	Verne, Jules (1828-1905)	French novelist	35	
83.	Calvino, Italo (b. 1923)	Italian novelist & short fiction writer	-34	•
84.	Updike, John (b. 1932)	American novelist, short fiction writer.	.34	·
		& poet		
85.	Neruda, Pablo	Chilean poet	33	1971
	(Neftali Ricardo Reyes) (1904-1973)		•.	
	Cather, Willa (1873-1947)	American novelist & short fiction writer	.31	
	Ellison, Ralph (b. 1914)	American novelist & short fiction writer	31	
	Ionesco, Eugène (b. 1912)	French playwright	-31	•
	García Lorca, Federico (1898-1936)	Spanish poet & playwright	31	
	O'Neill, Eugene (1888-1953)	American playwright	31	1936 1972
	Böll, Heinrich (b. 1917) Chabh an Anton Devlaviat	German novelist & short fiction writer	- 30 - 30	19.2
92.	Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904)	Russian playwright		
93.	Cocteau, Jean (1889-1963)	French playwright, novelist, & filmmaker	30	
	Pynchon, Thomas (b. 1937)	American novelist	29	•
	Lessing, Doris (b. 1919)	British novelist	27	•
	Churchill, Winston (1874-1965)	British statesman & historian	28	1953
97.	Hesse, Hermann (1877-1962)	Swiss novelist & poet, born in Germany	27	1946
98.	Kosinski, Jerzy (b. 1933)	American novelist, born in Poland	26	·
	Strindberg, Johan August	Swedish playwright	26	
100	(1849-1912) Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de	Snanich philocopher possilies & chart figures	26	
1107.	(1864-1936)	Spanish philosopher, novelist, & short fiction writer		
	11007 17001	writer		
	an at 19 a			

*Still eligible

Robert Penn Warren, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Saul Bellow for fiction. Robert Penn Warren won for poetry as well, along with Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Wallace Stevens, W.H. Auden, William Carlos Williams, and John Berryman. Norman Mailer received the Pulitzer for general non-fiction, and Eugene O'Neill for drama.

If our experience in the sciences is repeated in literature we can expect that many of the eligible authors in Figures 2 and 3 will win Nobel prizes in the future. However, considering the proclivity of the Academy for selecting relatively unknown writers, there is a high probability that the Nobel committee will only choose an author from these lists about 50% of the time.

One is tempted, finally, to speculate upon the possible effect of a Nobel prize as a stimulus to increased scholarly interest in the recipient's work. One of the characteristics of Nobel prize winners in science is that their work was cited

heavily and steadily long in advance of the prize.¹⁴ The prize itself, however, did not have a significant impact on citations afterwards. Only in certain cases did the prize seem to provide an additional spur to research in the field represented by the winner. However, in the case of literary scholarship the opposite is often the case. Since literary criticisms can never be the last word, the prize can stimulate a reappraisal of a well-researched writer and also spur new PhD dissertations and other writings about less known writers. When we have more years of the A&HCI to study, we can do some chronological analyses to determine whether authors who receive the Nobel prize are cited more frequently after they receive the award.

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My thanks to Esther Surden and Edward M. Sweeney for their help in the preparation of this essay.

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*Reprinted in: Garfield E. Essays of an information scientist. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1977. 2 vols.