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THE STORY BEHIND THE FAMOUS NOVEL: WHO PUBLISHED OF MICE AND MEN

When John Steinbeck completed his novella *Of Mice and Men* in early 1937, he was already an established writer with a growing reputation. Yet the question of who published **Of Mice and Men** is more than a simple fact of literary history. It is a story about timing, editorial vision, cultural context, and the birth of a book that would go on to become one of the most taught, read, and debated works in American literature. Understanding who published *Of Mice and Men* involves looking at the publishing landscape of 1930s America, the specific relationship between Steinbeck and his publisher, and how that partnership shaped the book's journey into the world.

Today, millions of readers encounter *Of Mice and Men* in classrooms, libraries, and bookshops. But behind every copy lies the decision of a publishing house to take a chance on a story about two migrant ranch workers during the Great Depression. So, who published *Of Mice and Men*? The answer is Covici-Friede, a New York-based publishing house that played a critical role in bringing Steinbeck's work to readers. However, the full story involves a deeper relationship between author and publisher, one that would last for decades.

THE PUBLISHER: COVICI-FRIEDE

The publishing house responsible for the first edition of *Of Mice and Men* was Covici-Friede. Founded by Pascal Covici and a partner, the firm had a reputation for taking on bold, socially conscious literature. Covici-Friede was not one of the largest publishing houses in the United States, but it was among the most adventurous. The company had previously published works by authors who pushed boundaries, both stylistically and politically.

Pascal Covici, the driving force behind the imprint, was known for his deep editorial engagement. He did not merely acquire manuscripts and send them to press. He worked closely with his authors, offering feedback, encouragement, and sometimes tough criticism. When John Steinbeck submitted the manuscript for *Of Mice and Men*, Covici recognized immediately that this was a special work. The novella was compact, emotionally potent, and unflinching in its portrayal of loneliness, friendship, and systemic injustice.

Why Covici-Friede Chose to Publish This

Book

To understand who published *Of Mice and Men* and why, it helps to consider the cultural moment. The mid-1930s were a time of economic hardship, labor unrest, and a growing public appetite for stories that addressed the realities of working-class life. Covici-Friede had already published Steinbeck's earlier novel *Tortilla Flat* in 1935, which enjoyed considerable success. That book brought Steinbeck a measure of fame and financial stability. When Steinbeck offered Covici-Friede his new manuscript, the publisher was eager to continue the partnership.

The editorial relationship between Steinbeck and Covici was unusually close. Covici understood Steinbeck's vision for *Of Mice and Men*, a story structured like a play and intended to be accessible to a wide audience. The publisher saw potential not only in the literary merit of the work but also in its commercial viability. In the hands of Covici-Friede, the novella was positioned to reach readers across the country.

THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE FIRST EDITION

For collectors and literary historians, the first edition of *Of Mice and Men* holds significant value. Knowing who published the book is essential for identifying a true first edition. Covici-Friede published the novel in February 1937. The first printing consisted of approximately 2,000 copies, though the exact number has been debated among bibliographers. The original dust jacket featured a simple but striking design, and the title page clearly displayed the publisher's name.

The first edition can be identified by several key details:

- The publisher imprint "Covici-Friede" on the title page and spine
- A copyright date of 1937
- No statement of later printings on the copyright page
- A dust jacket price of \$2.00

These details matter to collectors, but they also serve as a historical marker. The fact that Covici-Friede, a relatively small house, produced the first edition shows how the publishing world operated before the era of massive corporate consolidation.

THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT AND SALES SUCCESS

Covici-Friede's decision to publish *Of Mice and Men* paid off quickly. The novella was a commercial success, selling around 117,000 copies within its first year of publication. This was an impressive

figure for a work of literary fiction during the Great Depression. The success was driven in part by word-of-mouth, positive critical reception, and the novelty of the book's structure, which made it easy to adapt for the stage.

The publisher also played a key role in promoting the book. Covici-Friede arranged for advance copies to be sent to reviewers and booksellers. They capitalized on Steinbeck's growing reputation and the buzz surrounding his previous works. The publisher's marketing strategies, while modest by today's standards, were effective for the time.

THE TRANSITION TO VIKING PRESS

The story of who published *Of Mice and Men* does not end with Covici-Friede. After the success of the novella, Pascal Covici moved to Viking Press in 1938, and Steinbeck followed him. This meant that later editions of *Of Mice and Men* were published under the Viking imprint. Many readers today own Viking editions, which raises a natural question: wasn't Viking the original publisher?

The answer is no. Viking Press became Steinbeck's primary publisher *after* Covici-Friede. The switch happened because Steinbeck trusted Covici and wanted to continue working with him. When Covici joined Viking as an editor, Steinbeck brought his future books there. Viking subsequently acquired the rights to *Of Mice and Men* and has published it consistently since the late 1930s. Today, Penguin Random House, which owns Viking, publishes the book under various imprints.

This transition is important for understanding how the work has been distributed and marketed over the decades. While the first edition bears the Covici-Friede name, the vast majority of copies in circulation come from Viking or its parent company. So when someone asks who published *Of Mice and Men* in a contemporary context, the answer may be Viking or Penguin, depending on the edition.

THE ROLE OF PASCAL COVICI IN STEINBECK'S CAREER

Pascal Covici was more than just the answer to the question of who published *Of Mice and Men*. He was one of the most important figures in Steinbeck's professional life. Covici edited many of Steinbeck's major works, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery Row*, and *East of Eden*. Their relationship was built on mutual respect and a shared belief in the power of literature to illuminate social issues.

Covici's editorial approach was hands-on. He would read Steinbeck's manuscripts carefully and offer detailed suggestions. Steinbeck, for his part, trusted Covici's judgment. This partnership created an environment in which challenging material could be refined and presented effectively. Without Covici's support and editorial insight, *Of Mice and Men* might have been a very different book, or might not have reached its wide audience at all.

THE PUBLISHING LANDSCAPE OF THE 1930S

To fully understand who published *Of Mice and Men*, it helps to contextualize the American publishing industry of the 1930s. This was a time when independent publishers still played a major

role in literary culture. Houses like Covici-Friede, Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Scribner's competed for manuscripts from leading authors. The industry was not yet dominated by a handful of massive conglomerates.

Independent publishers like Covici-Friede were willing to take risks on unconventional works. *Of Mice and Men* was short, almost novella-length, and written in a style that mimicked a play. Many larger publishers might have pushed Steinbeck to expand the work or change its structure. Covici-Friede recognized the power of the story as it was and published it without demanding significant alterations.

This willingness to trust the author's artistic judgment was a hallmark of the best independent publishers of the era. It allowed works of genuine originality to reach the public, even when they did not conform to conventional expectations.

HOW THE PUBLISHER SHAPED THE BOOK'S RECEPTION

The publisher of a book influences not only its production but also its critical and cultural reception. Covici-Friede positioned *Of Mice and Men* as a major literary event. They emphasized Steinbeck's rising stature, the timeliness of the subject matter, and the emotional impact of the story. The publisher's promotional materials and the book's cover design signaled that this was an important work deserving of serious attention.

The book was reviewed widely, and critics frequently noted the role of the publisher in bringing forward such a stark and honest narrative. Covici-Friede's reputation for publishing socially engaged literature gave the book additional credibility among progressive readers and intellectuals.

FROM PUBLISHER TO CULTURAL ICON

Decades after its original publication, *Of Mice and Men* remains a fixture in American culture. It is taught in middle schools, high schools, and universities. It has been adapted into a play, multiple films, and even an opera. The book has been translated into dozens of languages. The publisher's name may not be something most readers think about, but it is an essential part of the book's history.

Knowing who published *Of Mice and Men* adds depth to our understanding of the work. It reminds us that books are not created in a vacuum. They are shaped by the people and institutions that bring them into the world. Covici-Friede, and later Viking Press, were not just printers and distributors. They were cultural gatekeepers who decided that Steinbeck's story deserved to be told.

COLLECTING FIRST EDITIONS

For book collectors, the question of who published *Of Mice and Men* has practical implications. First editions published by Covici-Friede in 1937 are valuable and sought after. Depending on condition, a first edition can sell for thousands of dollars. Collectors look for specific points of issue that distinguish the first printing from later printings.

The dust jacket is particularly important. The original jacket featured a design by Elmer Hader and

listed the price as \$2.00. Jackets in good condition are rare and add significantly to the value. The binding was light orange cloth with black stamping on the spine. These physical details connect modern readers to the historical moment of the book's release.

For those interested in collecting, understanding the publishing history is the first step. The publisher's name, the copyright page, and the condition of the dust jacket all matter. But beyond the monetary value, holding a first edition is a way of connecting with the original impact of the book.

THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF THE BOOK'S PUBLICATION

The publication of *Of Mice and Men* by Covici-Friede rippled outward far beyond the United States. Within a few years, editions appeared in the United Kingdom, Canada, and other English-speaking markets. The book was translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, and many other languages. International publishers licensed the rights from Covici-Friede and later from Viking.

This global reach means that the book's publishing history is complex. Different countries had different publishers, and the rights have been transferred multiple times over the decades. However, the original act of publication, the decision by Covici-Friede to release the book in 1937, is the foundational moment from which all other editions derive.

LESSONS FOR WRITERS AND READERS

The story of who published *Of Mice and Men* contains lessons for contemporary writers. It shows the importance of finding a publisher who believes in your work and is willing to support it. Steinbeck had found such a partner in Pascal Covici and Covici-Friede. The publisher's commitment was not just contractual but personal and editorial.

For readers, this history enriches the experience of the book.