

O. Henry Prize collections have contained stories as good as these two, yet they both appeared originally in a science fiction magazine. This fact reveals a state of affairs that practising writers have known about for a long time. It is becoming increasingly difficult for any really original, unconventional work to find its way into the formula magazines—whether devoted to the commercial or the avant-garde formulas. The science fiction magazines, however, *are* receptive to such work, so long as some small peremptory scientific twist is given to it. And so I suspect that many fine writers, tired of being too serious for *The Ladies Home Journal* and too unaffected for *The Partisan Review*, are deliberately putting their most interesting characters on Mars and projecting their most imaginative plots into the twenty-third century.

If we can get first-rate stories only by pretending that they don't belong to the main body of literature at all, then we will certainly cooperate in the fraud. But what a strange artistic climate we do live in!

**BUTTON-PUSHER'S DIARY:** Several years ago, some of the larger publishing houses—mindful of the success of certain small science fiction publishers and envisioning a new list of titles which might prove as successful as detective novels and Westerns—began to publish science fiction themselves. When this venture proved unsuccessful, they came up with the bright idea of offering what they considered outstanding science fiction without this label, publishing these works simply as fiction.

The fallacy in both these approaches, at least in so far as they apply to those with little or no experience in the field, is astutely noted in the current issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, by Damon Knight, probably the leading critic in the field and himself a science fiction novelist of no mean ability. As Mr. Knight points out, publishing snobbery virtually dictates that the quality of a science fiction novel be judged by how little science fiction actually appears in it.

Mordecai Roshwald's "*Level 7*" (McGraw-Hill, \$3.75) is a prime example of what Mr. Knight is talking about. While the publisher would undoubtedly argue that the book is "bigger" or "more important" than the ordinary science fiction novel, it does deal with events in the future; it does portray a society and a technology which do not now exist, and it does extrapolate from a fundamental situation today to what may be expected tomorrow. All these are part of the basic science fiction mixture.

Unfortunately, Mr. Roshwald makes rather a hash out of his well-meaning attempt to warn us of the dangers of push-button warfare, which is the theme of "*Level 7*." The book tells, in diary form, of seven months in the life of a Push-Button Officer on Level 7, actually a command post deep in the bowels of the earth which is charged with taking offensive action against the enemy should hostilities commence. The officer's job is to push, on command, the buttons that will launch a counter-attack, in the form of missiles with atomic warheads of varying ranges and destructiveness, after the enemy has struck.

His diary tells us of his daily existence on Level 7, so designated because there are six other underground shelters above it, as he moves from brooding over confinement in an artificial environment, through adjustment to the situation and a restless boredom, to the actual pushing of the buttons (after an unfortunate "accident") and the three-hour war which destroys most of the earth immediately and shortly thereafter kills off the remaining population, both above and below ground, through radiation poisoning. Since the leading character is entrusted with keeping the diary, he is naturally the last to die.

As a moral tract on the hazards of push-button atomic warfare (the book is dedicated with thoughtful irony "To Dwight and Nikita"), the book is excellent; as a novel, science fiction or otherwise, it fails almost entirely, especially when one recalls that this same theme has been handled time and time again far more effectively by lots of first-rate science fiction writers over the past twenty years.

While the prospect partially unveiled for us by Mr. Roshwald is a terrifying one, it could have been much more than that if his writing and creativity had matched the provocative theme he has selected.

—IRWIN HERSEY.



Jessamyn West—a larger canvas.

## West to Eden

"*South of the Angels*," by Jessamyn West (Harcourt, Brace. 564 pp. \$5.75), describes a conglomerate community of pioneers in pre-World War I California. William Hogan is the book editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

By William Hogan

WHEN ONE thinks of Jessamyn West, he thinks of a writer of intimate stories. "The Friendly Persuasion" was a warm, winning tale of a Quaker family of the Civil War era; "Cress Delahanty" was an equally beguiling account of an adolescent girl. These have been Miss West's two most popular and rewarding books, each welded together from short stories. For this Indiana-born Californian they established a reputation for style, characterization, humor, and impetuosity.

In "*South of the Angels*," her most ambitious novel to date, Miss West works on a larger canvas. This is an outsized, overpopulated treatment of a classic theme: the American pioneer on a new frontier. Miss West's craftsmanship is obvious here; her characters, as usual, are real and sympathetic. Yet whatever "*South of the Angels*" may be, it is not intimate.

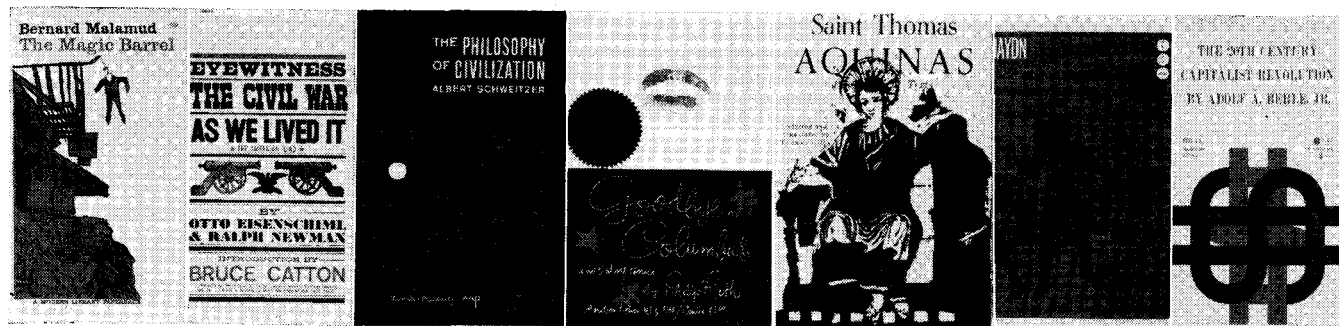
The year is 1916, when the latter-day pioneers streamed into Southern California from Iowa, Kentucky, Colorado, and other points east of this new Eden. It was a land of sunshine, heavy with the scent of cactus apples and orange blossoms. It was a land of opportunity and real estate schemes.

The Tract, in Miss West's novel, was one of those innumerable California cities of the future. A land investment project hacked out of barley land, this unimproved acreage was broken into small parcels for the would-be orange grower. Here the new pioneer sank roots, the threat of the Kaiser's war be hanged.

The Tract lay south of Los Angeles, that onetime Spanish pueblo named for Our Lady, Queen of the Angels. It was not far from Anaheim, Gardena, Monrovia, Pomona, Whittier (where Jessamyn West went to college), and lesser satellites which today are strung like a dime-store necklace around the urban phenomenon, "L.A."

Now one might expect satire to be a key element in any novel of land booms and investment opportunities in this region of wonderful nonsense (the ultimate development, of course, being Disneyland). But Miss West is not

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## PICK OF THE PAPERBACKS

**DOWN IN GREENWICH VILLAGE** last week there was a big like blowout by Gold Medal Books for its new paperback anthology called "The Beats" (35¢). It's a collection of writings by such beatniks as Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, and Norman Mailer (actually the chief of a splinter group called hipsters). Because Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, Mailer, and Seymour Krim, the book's editor, were going to be there the party attracted uptown editors wearing ties and girls wearing like dresses. As we entered a couple of guests were taking off their ties ("We don't want to make our hosts feel uncomfortable," one of them said). We looked for Kerouac, unsuccessfully. A hasty poll turned up only four beards and two pairs of sneakers. Mailer, surrounded by a cluster of girls in blue jeans and like black stockings, was the center of attention. He wore a natty blue suit and tie. Saw Ferlinghetti, Krim, still no Kerouac. One little girl beatnik sporting a three-foot pony tail told us that the beats were through in 1953 but their literature was only just now catching on. Spotted Ferlinghetti; he never took his raincoat off. Nobody recited poetry, nobody chanted aloud. It was all like an uptown literary party only like without ties and without Kerouac.

**PRIZE IN PAPERBACK:** The new Meridian Fiction series had scarcely gotten underway when Philip Roth's "Goodbye, Columbus," one of the first eight titles issued, won the 1960 National Book Award for Fiction. It is believed that this is the first time a winner has been published in a paperbound edition at the time of the award. Meridian reports that the book has enjoyed a sharp upsurge in orders since the announcement; in fact the publisher had to go back to press with another prepublication printing. Booksellers, incidentally, report that browsers tend to touch gingerly the lipstick mark on Paul Rand's striking cover design for "Goodbye, Columbus." They seem relieved to find that the paint is not wet.

**BY NO MEANS** do we want to let pass without fanfare the publication by Bantam of "The Best Western Stories of Ernest Haycox" (50¢). Mr. Haycox, who died a decade past, was regarded by many, among them Ernest Hemingway, not only as the finest of Western writers but as a proper artist. It was largely he who transformed the stock Western types into believable people with real problems. There was scarcely an aspect of the West from earliest pioneer days until the turn of the century that he did not illuminate.

**WHAT'S NEW:** New American Library, perplexed by the oft-quoted 1959 Gallup poll estimate that only 20 per cent of Americans were reading a book during the month they answered the query, asks, "How could Gallup be right?" NAL then goes on to report that the lower-priced paperback industry alone sells over 350 million books annually, that book clubs sell another 70 million, and that hard cover publishers account for yet another 28 million. Can there be that many unread volumes on the bookshelves of America? . . . Attention, calorie-counters. Myra Waldo, whose tempting cookbooks have lured many a dieter from the path of abstinence, has now prepared "The Complete Reducing Cookbook" (Perma-book, 35¢), filled with waistline-watching recipes and menus. How about this one: cocktails, hors d'œuvres, cream of tomato soup, Rock Cornish game hen with wild rice and artichoke hearts, wine, chocolate roll, and coffee—all this, promises Miss Waldo, for a mere 825 calories . . . Hemingway, who is already amply represented in paperbacks, assumes a new role as anthologist of Berkley's "Men at War," which includes accounts of famous battles through history, written by such distinguished observers as Hugo, Churchill, and "Papa" himself. —R.W.S.

### FICTION

One of the happiest developments in the paperback field is the publishing of first-rate fiction which, while often enjoying a *succès d'estime* in hard cover, never reached a broad audience. Certainly Meridian ought to take a few bows. Its energetic new fiction program, judging by its first titles, offers imaginative, intelligent, and tasteful selections. A few of the spring books are "The Towers of Trebizond" (\$1.35), Rose Macaulay's all but unclassifiable story of love and metaphysics on the shores of the Black Sea; Frederick Buechner's stylish "A Long Day's Dying" (\$1.45), Sybille Bedford's "A Legacy" (\$1.45), an elegant re-creation of aristocratic life in pre-World War I Berlin, and Philip Roth's award-winning "Goodbye, Columbus" (\$1.45).

Bernard Malamud also received the National Book Award for Fiction, in 1959, for his collection of stories, "The Magic Barrel" (Modern Library, 95¢). Like Roth, he writes about Jews in America, but the comparison goes no farther. For all of their humor and tenderness, Malamud's stories are closer to the darker, more tragic tones of Sholem Aleichem.

For lovers of whimsy, B. J. Chute's "Greenwillow" (Dell, 35¢) tells a gentle tale of a Brigadoon-like land where dwell kind hearts and genial people, a minister by the name of Mr. Birdsong, and a family, troubled by the father's penchant wanderlust. Not everyone can take this much fancy, but for those who can, this is lighthearted enchantment.

Nothing could be farther from such blithe spirits than "The Don Flows Home to the Sea" (Signet, 75¢), Mikhail Sholokhov's robust sequel to "And Quiet Flows the Don." At the conclusion of the first book the Soviets have won their revolution; this one in following the eventful time between 1918 and 1921 traces the arduous course of battle to win the peace.