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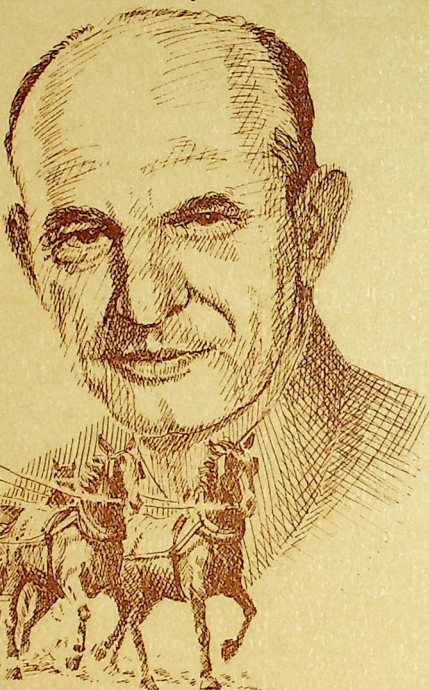


WESTERN WRITERS SERIES

No. 86

ERNEST HAYCOX

by Richard W. Etulain



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Boise State University Western Writers Series Number 86

Ernest Haycox

By Richard W. Etulain
University of New Mexico

Editors: Wayne Chatterton
James H. Maguire

Business Manager:
James Hadden

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Ernest Haycox

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In the mid-1950s noted journalist and historian Bernard De Voto referred to novelist Ernest Haycox (1899-1950), as “the old pro of horse opera,” the writer who “came closer than anyone else to making good novels” of the popular Western. Haycox, continued De Voto, “left his mark—I should say brand—on the style as well as the content of the Western” (14). In the nearly two generations since Haycox’s death many other commentators on the Old West as well as several writers of Westerns have agreed with De Voto in assigning Ernest Haycox a pivotal role in the development of the fictional Western. While specialists in Western American literature frequently dismiss Haycox and other writers of Westerns, those acquainted with the popular genre often compare his fiction favorably with that of Zane Grey, Luke Short, and Louis L’Amour.

Ernest Haycox is clearly a notable figure in the rise of the popular Western novel. Indeed, a study of his literary career from 1920 to 1950 serves as a brief introduction to the development of the Western during those three decades. In the first decade or so of his career he served an apprenticeship writing pulp Westerns, but by the early 1930s he had broken into the slick magazines and for more than a decade was a premier writer of Westerns for *Collier’s*. Gradually placing more stress on character conflict and adding historical Westerns to his fictional arsenal, Haycox tried, in the last half dozen years of his life, to break from the Western and to produce notable historical novels of the West.

Haycox's early life helps to explain the shape of his literary career. Born near Portland, Oregon, in 1899, Haycox was the son of an itinerant father and a German Jewish mother. After his parents separated before he was eleven, he moved about a good deal, staying with relatives and friends through his public school years. Before entering Reed College in the fall of 1919, he served with the Oregon Infantry during the summer of 1916 as it helped to chase bandit leader Pancho Villa along the Mexican Border. A year later he joined the Army and was sent to France during World War I. Discharged in February of 1919, Haycox returned to Oregon and enrolled that fall at Reed, where, as he had in high school, he wrote for several campus publications. Realizing that he must earn a living while aspiring to become an author, Haycox transferred to the University of Oregon to major in journalism.

At Oregon, while contributing to campus publications and maintaining a strong academic record, Haycox also learned the tricks of writing for pulp magazines. Enrolling in several creative writing courses, he fell under the tutelage of Professor W. F. G. Thacher, who encouraged Haycox to read and—if necessary—imitate the style and format of popular magazine fiction. At the same time, Haycox wrote a good deal for the *Emerald*, the university newspaper, including a well-known column "The Campus Cynic," and later edited the *Sunday Emerald*. Before he graduated in the spring of 1923, he had also placed several short stories in pulp magazines.

In the eight years between his graduation from Oregon and his first appearance in *Collier's* in 1931, Haycox served his apprenticeship in the pulps, learning what editors and readers wanted in these publications and suiting his style and subject matter to these interests. As his good friend and fellow writer Robert Ormond Case noted, Haycox "was an untiring and unflagging student of techniques" (letter to W. F. G. Thacher, 23 Jan. 1952, Haycox

Papers). At first Haycox wrote for a variety of pulp magazines, including *Sea Stories* and *Detective Story* but gradually centered his efforts on *Western Story*, where editor Frank D. Blackwell urged him to stick to the Western and to focus on stories of adventure, character conflict, and frontier settings. By 1928 Haycox, now a familiar name in *Western Story*, was also breaking into other front-rank pulp magazines, but he was yet unable to land his writings in slicks like *Collier's* and *Saturday Evening Post*.

Haycox's increasing abilities to blend action, adventure, and Western materials are clear in his first novel, *Free Grass* (1929). The story of a cattle trail drive from Texas to the Dakotas, *Free Grass* centers on two protagonists: Tom Gillette, a Westerner returning from schooling in the East; and Blondy Lispenard, an Easterner who comes west with Tom. While Tom withstands the demanding Western environment, Blondy falls before its coercive forces. Meanwhile, Tom also has to decide between Christine, an alluring but selfish and proud Eastern woman, and Lorena, the vivacious daughter of a former Texas rancher. Tom illustrates the Western hero who by the 1920s inhabited the novels of Owen Wister, Max Brand, and Zane Grey and the films of William S. Hart and Tom Mix. Adhering to a Western code that fused Southern gentlemanliness and frontier individualism, Tom follows the dictates of his father who tells his son, "Play your own hand, ask no favors, ride straight, shoot fast. Keep all obligations" (Quotes from Haycox's work will not carry the usual page reference because no standard hardback or paperback version is available to most readers.)

Reviewers reacted well to *Free Grass*, one calling it the "best western novel . . . [he] had read in a long time," and another a "careful reproduction of the cattle range as it was" (Charles Alexander, "Haycox on Cows," Albany, Oregon, *Democrat* 9 Feb. 1929: 4). While Haycox much appreciated these positive reactions,

he admitted that his plot was thin, a limitation from which (he thought) his novels would suffer until he could free himself from pulp serials. Still, he aimed most of all at entertaining his readers, and he was convinced that *Free Grass* was sound and enticing entertainment.

Unfortunately, Haycox's second novel, *Chaffee of Roaring Horse* (1930), is in every way inferior to *Free Grass*. A hackneyed plot, stereotyped characters, and repetitions from Haycox's earlier story "A Rider of the High Mesa" (*Short Stories* 25 Sept. 1927) undercut the value of *Chaffee*. Moreover, it seems hastily written, with a stylized format and unimaginative protagonists. Such is not the case, however, with *Whispering Range* (1931), Haycox's last pulp serial and the apogee of his earliest novels.

A remarkable improvement on *Chaffee*, *Whispering Range* features Dave Denver, a cattle rancher, and his attempts to rid his range of cattle thieves and his struggles to decide between Lola Monterey and Eve Leverage. Alongside Denver's storyline are a well-crafted subplot as well as two very believable sidekick cowboys, Means and Wango, whose chorus-like commentaries characterize Denver, amplify thematic concerns in the novel, and provide comic relief.

The ideas in *Whispering Range* also illustrate Haycox's worldview. Convinced early on that breaks in life came only to those who planned ahead and headed off all opposition, Haycox has his hero say in acting on his own: "I wouldn't ask another man to be my catspaw, and I'm damned if I'll be catspaw for a few men who are unable to keep their own range free." Later, an onlooker praises Denver for his persistence, his willingness to fight back even if an uncertain world tries to dull his aspirations. As Haycox's life and career had already demonstrated, a man sufficiently determined and forceful could do much to shape his own future.

Haycox's third novel signaled an important advancement. It not

only solidified his position as a writer of pulp Westerns, it also proved that he could produce a popular novel with believable characters in a genre tied to formulaic figures. Moreover, the novel sold well, with first printing sales of 6,000 tripling those of *Free Grass*. The publication of *Whispering Range* ended Haycox's apprenticeship in the pulps and prepared the way for his entry into the slicks.

By the time Haycox made his first appearance in *Collier's* in 1931, that magazine was challenging *Saturday Evening Post* as the leading outlet for American popular fiction. As a diligent student of American journals, Haycox realized *Collier's* was interested in adventure stories and in Westerns, especially if they were brief, lively, and to the point. During the 1920s the magazine had published Westerns by several writers, but when Zane Grey and Peter B. Kyne ceased writing Westerns for *Collier's* in 1930, Haycox moved in to take their place. Over the next seven years, he would write forty-seven stories and seven serials for *Collier's*, becoming its most dependable provider of Westerns from the early 1930s to the beginning 1940s.

But Haycox's first stories in *Collier's* were not notably stronger than his later pulp fiction. In fact, he had trouble adjusting to the succinct style of *Collier's* and at the same time betrayed his ongoing difficulty in creating full-bodied characters. "Dolorosa, Here I Come," Haycox's first story in *Collier's* (28 Feb. 1931), illustrates well these problems. Danny Dale, a young cattle drive foreman, and his Running W men arrive in Dolorosa, a hellacious trail town. Dale tries to keep his men away from trouble and out of the hands of Lingersen, the marshal, but early in the evening they fall upon evil ways and have to ride to keep out of jail. While galloping out of Dolorosa, Danny sees a "woman's face, soft and sad, looking at him. Directly at him with a queer, tense expres-

sion." This glimpse, Haycox implies, is all Danny needs to bring him back. At the end he must square off with and shoot down Lingersen before he can win the girl. The tale is a simple narrative that contains little character development. More disappointing, the action, especially that surrounding the decision of Dale to return to Dolorosa, is unmotivated and exaggerated. While the style and dialogue illustrate advances over the *Western Story* pieces, the characterization is as weak as that of its predecessors.

Several of the early stories written for *Collier's* from 1931 to 1934 share the defects of "Dolorosa, Here I Come." In part, Haycox seemed unable to write stories in which a plot centers on one dramatic situation. Nor could he limit the dramatis personae to one or two figures. "The Last Draw" (4 Feb. 1933) and "The Last Rodeo" (20 May 1933) are short tales of 5,000 to 6,000 words, but each contains four or five characters introduced as if they were major figures. Because of the brevity of these works Haycox was unable to do justice to each character, thus weakening the impact of each story. Even in such stories as "Officer's Choice" (4 July 1931), "When You Carry a Star" (5 Dec. 1931), and "In Bullhide Canyon" (25 Feb. 1933), where single episodes are emphasized, strong characterization is lacking. Likewise Haycox too often burdened stories with an unneeded character to add a strain of romance, as he did in "An Evening's Entertainment" (26 Sept. 1931) and "One More River" (7 May 1932). Not until the mid-1930s did Haycox seem able to shake off some of these weaknesses.

In *Starlight Rider* (1933), however, his first serial in *Collier's*, Haycox proved to be more successful. Although the plot is commonplace, the handling of character is noteworthy. After spending three months recuperating from an injury, Hugh Tracy returns to Antelope town, where he finds himself caught in the conflict between the TS and Testervis ranches. While Tracy attempts to resolve

the conflict, a girl, Lynn Isherwood, the unsuspecting cousin of the owner of the Testervis holdings, has to appear. Lynn and Hugh, once they discover one another, cooperate in overpowering the enigmatic hold that Lake Tolbert, the foreman of TS, has on Antelope.

The chief merit of this novel, its characterizations, raises it artistically above his early short stories in *Collier's*. Indeed, the ten installments of *Starlight Rider*, each slightly longer than a short story, allowed Haycox to develop his major characters at greater length. Lake Tolbert, for example, is different from anything that Haycox had used thus far, an ambiguous man of conflicting good and evil desires. His ambivalence particularly adds a new dimension to Haycox's Western since Lynn Isherwood and Hugh Tracy are strong individualists, undeterred by the uncertain world that threatens them.

Generally, Haycox followed much the same pattern in his early years in *Collier's* as he had in *Western Story* and Doubleday and Doran magazines. Once he had placed a story with a periodical he was reluctant to make any changes until he was certain that his position was well established. This cautious routine became the pattern for most of Haycox's career.

By 1935 Haycox's work began to change. Thus far, he told a journalist, he had "concentrated on the Western type of story, with action as the predominant note." Now he felt "the urge to develop characterization and the reflective type of story" (Wallace S. Wharton, "Writing a Working Craft," *Oregon Journal* 31 Mar. 1935). This new emphasis on character, he added, was not easy, for the writer had to shape figures that were not merely spokesmen for an author but separate identities in themselves.

Noting this increased emphasis on more complex characterization in Haycox's stories and serials, a commentator placed Haycox among

those popular writers producing "character-conflict yarns" (Joseph B. Fox, "The Character-Conflict Yarn," *Author and Journalist* 20 [1935]: 6-7). While Haycox had employed a good deal of struggle among his characters in his earlier writings, his employment of this technique became more pronounced after the mid-1930s. In such stories as "The Man with Smoke Grey Eyes" (1 Dec. 1934) and "Against the Mob" (19 July 1935) and in his second serial for *Colliers*, *The Silver Desert* (1935), Haycox created several persuasive characters whose clashes among one another enlarge and deepen their meanings.

But the most significant achievement of this period in Haycox's career was his notable short story "Stage to Lordsburg" (10 Apr. 1937), which John Ford purchased and made into his remarkable Western film, *Stagecoach* (1939), starring John Wayne. One of Haycox's finest stories, "Stage to Lordsburg" illustrates the advances he made as a writer in the 1930s. Here, Haycox proved he could write a short, dramatic story; he was able to fulfill the formula of *Collier's* and at the same time to write a story with considerable literary merit.

In "Stage to Lordsburg" the stress is not on action but on character. Indeed, the opening paragraph sets the scene for the dramatic possibilities of human experience.

This was one of those years in the Territory when Apache smoke signals spiraled up from the stony mountain summits and many a ranch cabin lay as a square of blackened ashes on the ground and the departure of a stage from Tonto was the beginning of an adventure that had no certain happy ending.

Seven persons, each a different social type, board the stage for Lordsburg: army girl, Englishman, gambler, cattleman, whiskey drummer, outlaw, and prostitute. "They were," says Haycox, "all strangers

packed closely together, with nothing in common save a destination."

The scheme of the story is simple. The travelers leave Tonto in the early morning, travel to a waiting station, and stop for the evening. The next morning they encounter a band of Apaches, fight them off, and arrive at Lordsburg in the late afternoon. Given central focus are Henriette, the prostitute, and the reactions of the other characters, particularly the outlaw Malpais Bill, to her. The opening paragraphs clarify how a frontier society looks upon this lady of shady reputation. The men encircle the stage, nod slyly to one another when she appears, and, once inside, the cattleman gives her a "deliberate smile." But she looks away. Haycox says of her: "She was young, yet she had a knowledge that put the cattleman and the gambler and the drummer and army girl in their exact places." And she understands her own place on the social ladder. "The army girl was in one world and she was in another, as everyone in the coach understood. It had no effect on her for this was a distinction she had learned long ago." Only the blond man, Malpais Bill, can break through her indifferent facade. He, too, is beyond the frontier of respectability and comprehends the social ostracism she endures. Clearly, the similarity of their status gives them a bond of understanding that the others cannot share.

When they meet alone at the overnight stop, the outlaw questions Henriette about her life. She is open about it. Because she was left an orphan early on, she had taken up this life to exist. It has been a hard life, and she has paid a high toll. No one would be waiting for her at the end of the trip, for, as she says, "I run a house in Lordsburg." Malpais Bill also notes that beneath the rough outer appearances she has a sympathetic heart: she is the only occupant who tries to comfort the drummer, who is slowly dying a painful death. And during the fight with the Apaches her

courage challenges the rest. The positive characteristics intrigue the outlaw, and he speaks to her of his land and a half-finished house. But she is right in suggesting marriage is too much to expect, and when Haycox manages to bring them together, his conclusion seems forced and unnatural. (John Ford, by the way, used the same conclusion in *Stagecoach*.) The ending may be satisfying sentimentally but not artistically. The happy ending, while conforming to the expected formula of *Collier's*, is inconsistent with the dominant semitragic tone and mars an otherwise highly successful story.

Haycox was far from satisfied with what he had accomplished by 1937. He told Thacher that he wanted his stories to contain more dramatic settings and more realistic characters. Too many of his stories, he thought, appeared artificial. Economic success was not enough; he wanted to write something better but was unsure of the method he should use. In the next few years he was to come upon a technique that enhanced the realism of his works without his having to leave his lucrative position with *Collier's*. He was, in short, to become a writer of historical Westerns.

One might expect that Ernest Haycox would have been quite satisfied by 1937 with his writing career. For fifteen years he had struggled to make a living with his pen; now he had achieved that elusive goal. *Collier's* was accepting all his writings—short stories and serials—and paying a handsome price for them. Shorter pieces were bringing at least \$800, and the novels were rumored to be worth up to \$20,000. Haycox was making more than \$25,000 a year and was assured a comfortable living for his family. The future looked even brighter.

Even more pleasing to Haycox was the increasing recognition he was receiving as a well-known writer of Westerns. His yearly productions were getting favorable reviews in the New York

newspapers, and, as one Eastern literary agent, Sydney Sanders, pointed out, editors and writers alike generally conceded that Haycox was near or topped the Western writers list. Moreover, Little, Brown and Company, noting his increasing importance in the Western field, offered to replace Doubleday as his hardcover publisher, and Haycox accepted. A wise decision, this switch meant increased advertising of his books, greater sales, and the prestige of a better publishing firm.

Despite these encouraging omens, Haycox was dissatisfied. For the most part, unlike such craftsmen as Zane Grey and Max Brand, he was not content to construct repetitious novels and short stories. Every novel, he thought, had to surpass previous efforts. That being the case, he would produce serials not only readable and interesting but also of greater artistic merit. To Haycox's credit, he was dissatisfied with his artistic success. In fact, few writers of straight Westerns before or since have been more ambitious than he. His discontent with the formula Western sent him in several directions in search of new techniques for his writings.

At first Haycox seemed certain of what he did not want to accomplish. There were two basic kinds of novels, he told Thacher, but he knew that one was out for him. Admitting that he did not have a deep mind, Haycox realized the "cerebral type" of fiction was something he could not write. Nor was he interested in the pessimistic novels being written in the late 1930s. And the "shock" style of Ernest Hemingway, who wrote of a "man and woman lying in a shed and going very descriptively through their natural functions," was not for Haycox. Nor did he see any reason to write for the critical elite; works of that type did not suit his natural talents and would most likely be extremely contrived.

A second type, however, was alluring. Haycox was confident that he could eventually turn out large, panoramic novels. He would

not attempt picaresque fiction, nor a psychological study of a handful of characters. Rather he would work within the confines of a larger framework and attempt something like *Les Miserables*. That novel, Haycox continued, was symphonic. Containing numerous characters, these panoramic symphonies could aim at the totality of human existence. He wanted his ideal work "to be a robust story, crowded, detailed, active, a good story *per se*. Full of brutality and tragedy; with its pieces of vivid action—and the will o' the wisp romance" (Jimmy Arenz, "Literary Artist Gives Advice," *Nine Day Papers* 2 July 1941: 7).

Haycox knew his aims were high, and he was the first to confess that his theory was usually much better than his practice. The large-canvas type of novel might be his ideal, but a more troublesome problem was nearer at hand: how could he escape the format of his previous literary efforts? To plunge into something entirely new was too dangerous, economically and artistically. Perhaps a few more of his popular adventure-romance serials would clear his mind of that type. After that he could go on to a newer type of writing. For Haycox, thinking of this sort seems paradoxical because thus far in his career he had suggested repeatedly to inquirers that the path to success was adhering to a single story structure until it was mastered. That he should think he could be the exception to his own advice seems odd unless one considers Haycox's situation. For twelve years or so he had written virtually nothing but Western stories and serials and had proved the soundness of his advice in mastering the necessary techniques. Having reached the top in his field and wishing to achieve something better, he had to decide whether to leave the Western or to make additional innovations in its formula. Haycox deliberated a great deal over this difficult decision, but gradually decided to continue in the Western tradition while making significant innovations.

In the six years between 1937 and 1943, Haycox followed many experiences of earlier years. Having found techniques that appealed to editors and readers alike, Haycox applied them recurrently in varying forms. For example, in the early 1930s he began putting more stress on character development, and by 1935, a new type of Western hero was emerging, particularly in his serials. A Hamlet-like figure was gradually replacing cowboys whose life consisted merely of fighting, shooting, and romancing. This new Sun God hero, as Bernard De Voto called him, appeared in Haycox's writings with increasing frequency and dominated his novels through the publication of *Long Storm* (1946). This character added not only a new facet to the Western but also provided the author with an outlet for his developing philosophical postures.

Owen Meritt in *Man in the Saddle* (1938) and Clay Morgan in *Saddle and Ride* (1940) are typical of the Hamlet-of-the-Plains hero. So that Owen might contemplate throughout the course of his novel, Haycox involves him in several conflicts. He cannot decide whether he ought to marry Sally Bidwell or Nan Melotte. A successful match, Haycox seems to say through Owen, will come about not through mutual forbearance but through mutual understanding. When Sally determines to marry Will Isham because he offers her a secure future, Owen tries to show her that this kind of bargain will never work. Not until she senses the futility of her agreement, however, does she admit the truth of Owen's warning, and by that time her life is already ruined. Nan, on the other hand, epitomizes all that Owen has outlined as necessary for a suitable mate. She is willing to give herself but will not acquiesce to a one-sided affair.

A second clash that illustrates the character of the Hamlet hero is Owen's indecision concerning his role in his surroundings. Should he merely move on, as he has on several other occasions, or should

he fight his enemies on his terms and with his methods? Settling the question is an agonizing task, as Owen's frequent soliloquies disclose, but finally he refuses to shirk social responsibility. At the end he is successful because he can balance head and heart and because he is tenacious enough to fight against his implacable foes.

Clay Morgan is similar in many respects to Owen Meritt. He too spends much time thinking about his actions, trying especially to elude the chokehold the past has on him. Ten years earlier he had married Lila, who died soon after in the birth of their daughter, Janet, now nine years old. Lila still dominates Clay's memory because he is guilt-ridden over their unhappy marriage. While two young women of the present vie for his attentions, he is too tied to the past to notice.

Gradually, *Saddle and Ride* is powered by character in tension. This strain mounts to its highest point near the conclusion; then Clay's actions bring release. In the first part of the work, Clay is frequently involved in situations calling for immediate reactions. Several of his friends criticize him for vacillating and for not acting immediately, but he confronts the situations in his own way. Settling these mental conflicts allows Haycox ample opportunity to develop Clay as a Hamlet figure resolving his doubts. Like Owen Meritt, he must come to a conclusion alone; no one can share it with him.

In other Haycox Westerns, the Hamlet strain, especially as utilized in *Rim of the Desert* (1944) and *The Wild Bunch* (1943), is not reserved merely for heroes. In the former, Aurora Brant and Portia Crews are both attracted to Jim Keene, one of Haycox's restless men who, like Shane, rides out of a mysterious past. And when the two girls meet, the reader needs to take a seat and rest a space, for they talk a long spell of passion, frigidity, and love. In *The Wild Bunch* everyone has his chance to take to the stump,

and each does. Frank Goodnight speaks of the necessity for revenge upon the man who has violated his sister. Virginia Overman wonders whether she should throw herself at Goodnight, and her opponent, Rosalia Lind, wavers between possession of and subjection to him. Two villains—Boston Bill Royal and Henry Ide—even holster their guns to reflect too long about nothing.

Several writers have pointed to the Hamlet hero in Haycox as his most significant contribution to the Western. But when one takes a second glance the appearance of the new figure is not an unalloyed success. Grafting a pensive character onto a largely action story is a difficult task, and Haycox is not always effective in solving the problem. For instance, when a single character comes up stage and apostrophizes, his speeches often seem out of place. Allow one of Haycox's heroes to climb into the saddle and pull away from the group, and soon his mind is working overtime. He either takes a text and preaches to himself, or he sets up standards that will straighten out the rest of his world. Sermons like these are sprinkled throughout Haycox's writings in the late 1930s.

Meanwhile, another new technique intrigued Haycox. Because he wished to stress the influence of the past and to give his Westerns more authentic backgrounds, he was searching for an approach that might aid him in achieving both goals. He found the answer in history, which helped him to emphasize the past and also to add the stamp of authenticity to his works.

As early as his college days Haycox had shown an interest in history. Aside from enrolling in the normal history courses, he purchased historical volumes for his growing library and one summer reviewed history books for a Eugene newspaper. His classmates were to remember, too, that while yet at the university he had begun studying the lives of early Western settlers. During his apprenticeship years in the pulps he continued to build up his

historical library and even considered taking graduate history courses so that he might write authoritative historical fiction. Once he chose the frontier as his fictional domain he rarely strayed from writing about the historical Old West.

But Haycox aimed at writing fiction, not historical monographs. In novels such as *Free Grass* and *The Silver Desert*, he was satisfied to give a general historical background—what it was like to take part in a cattle drive or to live on a large cattle ranch. The emphasis, however, is not primarily on history but almost entirely on action. As Haycox told one audience in 1935, he avoided fiction based on the events of history because fiction of that type raised too many arguments and unimportant questions. Readers were too likely to quarrel over the length of a street or the location of a building, frequently overlooking the importance of the plot. So the best policy was to follow general trends of history, which Haycox did until the publication of *Trouble Shooter*.

Serialized in *Collier's* in 1936, *Trouble Shooter*, Haycox's first historical Western, opens the second stage in his literary career. To prepare the historical background of the serial, he traveled along the entire route of the Union Pacific, and in his spare time over a three- or four-year period read old newspapers and browsed through available original accounts covering the building of the first transcontinental railroad. Finding "comparatively little" first-hand material, Haycox turned to several substantial secondary studies. Extensive marginalia in his personal copies suggest that he relied heavily on Edwin L. Sabin's *Building the Pacific Railway* and J. R. Perkin's *Trails, Rails, and War*, a biography of General Grenville Dodge. His library also contains Dodge's *How We Built the Union Pacific*, Nelson Trottman's *History of the Union Pacific*, and sundry pamphlets that Union Pacific issued during the building of the road. From these varied materials Haycox constructed a credible account

of the frantic months of competition with the Central Pacific before the meeting at Promontory Point. Along the way, interspersed among the scenes of railroad construction and Indian fighting, are various portraits of such historical personages as Grenville Dodge, Samuel Reed, President Grant, and Daniel and Jack Casement.

Grafted upon this factual background is a plot centering on Frank Peace, trouble shooter for the railroad. The story line contains the usual ingredients of the Haycox Western: Hamlet hero, two heroines, and generous servings of exciting action. As one reviewer pointed out, the novel was a "combination [of] a Western thriller and a historical novel" (*New York Times Book Review* 24 Jan. 1937: 14). To imply, however, that the mere juxtaposing of fact and fiction lifted this work above Haycox's other novels would be misleading. The difference is that the characters participate in the historical backdrop. This mutuality is clear when Peace and Eileen Oliver witness the driving of the golden spike at Promontory, and she remarks: "How final it is. I have lived in the middle of fury so long. Tomorrow it will seem like living in an empty house." The reader, too, senses what it must have been like to have been associated with the building of the first transcontinental and thus participates in the impact of the past on its times as well as on the present.

Since *Trouble Shooter* is Haycox's first effort at the historical Western, the novel, not surprisingly, betrays the author's difficulties with the new genre. Like many other authors of historical novels, Haycox has difficulty organizing his sections of fact and fiction. Often, his chunks of history are strategically placed, usually at the beginning of a new serial installment. Or, to balance the pace of his narrative, he sets off scenes of action with sections of documentation. This "using" of history gives the novel an artificial quality, suggesting that much of the factual material is organized merely

as the author sees fit. *Trouble Shooter*, then, successfully adds a new ingredient to the Western, although in his inexperienced hands history and fiction are yet uneasy partners.

Haycox had an even more ambitious novel in mind when he began his new historical Western on frontier Arizona. Early in 1938, about one year before the serial would appear in *Collier's*, he wrote to a close friend outlining at length what he hoped to do in his next long piece. He said that it would deal with Arizona from 1865 to 1885, covering the transition period from wilderness to civilization and including the Apache wars, the founding of ranches and towns, the reign of outlaws, and the development of a territory. It would be about pioneering in the era of General Grant, with an emphasis on people, their political and economic growth, and their romanticism while maintaining a primitive social morality.

Had he carried out his aspirations, Haycox might well have achieved the "panoramic novel" he had spoken of earlier. There is, however, an idealistic note to this letter, for even if he had accomplished most of this enthusiastic project, *Collier's* could hardly have accepted the work since its editorial requirements excluded any novel of these dimensions. And Haycox gives no evidence of planning the novel for any outlet other than *Collier's*. This divergence between goals and achievement suggests that Haycox was not always as realistic about his writing, particularly to himself, as he might have been. On the one hand he could lay out aspiring projects that if carried to conclusion might have established him as a leading novelist of the West, and yet in practice none of his early serials reached these high goals.

The Border Trumpet (1939) is a case in point. In no way does it cover two decades of pioneer Arizona history. These dimensions are much too broad; instead the story is set in the territory in the early 1870s and deals, at the most, with the events of two

or three months. The main emphasis is on army life at the frontier station, Fort Grant, but there are frequent diversions into Tucson and the Apache country. Generally, the historical and geographical details, drawn mostly from John G. Bourke's *On the Border with Crook*, are accurate. In fact, some of the scenes and descriptions are transplanted virtually intact from this source. Bourke calls Tucson "the Mecca of the dragoon, the Naples of the desert . . . [dreamier] than any town from Santa Fe to Los Angeles . . . with one exception only: its great rival, the thoroughly American town of Prescott . . . amid the granite crop of the foot-hills of the Mogollan" (56-57). Haycox's spokesman says of the town: "This . . . is the Mecca of the Southwest. There is nothing like it from San Antonio to San Diego, except perhaps Prescott up in the Mogollan range. But Prescott is strictly America" (141). In fact, the entire chapter describing Tucson is borrowed directly from Bourke.

In this and other historical sections of the novel, the facts and fiction are better integrated than they were in *Trouble Shooter*. Moreover, the triangle of main characters—Tom Benteen, hero; Phil Castleton, villain; and Eleanor Warren, heroine—participates actively in the historic events. Rather than allowing the factual materials to be a mere parallel backdrop, as they are in so many pieces of historical fiction, Haycox brings them into a contiguous relation with his story and thus weaves the fine fabric of historical fiction.

Interestingly, Haycox was reluctant to follow up the success of *The Border Trumpet* with other historical Westerns. *Saddle and Ride* (1940), *Rim of the Desert* (1941), and *Trail Town* (1941) are not historical novels, although the latter could pass for a generalized picture of Tom Smith's hard-fisted control of cowtown Abilene. Not until *Alder Gulch* (1942) did Haycox try his hand at another Western based on precise factual documentation. Then followed distinctively weaker *Action by Night* (1943) and *The Wild Bunch*

(1943), both of which are the anywhere-in-the-West variety.

Alder Gulch, like *The Border Trumpet*, represents an artistic advancement over *Trouble Shooter*. It too joins fictional characters, Jeff Pierce and Diana Castle, with historical figures, Henry Plummer and X. Biedler, in the maelstrom of activity following the discovery of gold in Alder Gulch, Montana, in 1864. The imaginative characters are involved in the stream of historical events and yet remain individuals apart from it. While Jeff and Diana entangle themselves in a romantic affair typical of Haycox's novels, their characters are sufficiently different to merit attention.

Jeff Pierce is the Haycox man with a new wrinkle, a hero with deeper insights and stronger passions. Similar to many of Ernest Hemingway's characters, he suffers from a wounded psyche after a series of traumatic experiences has opened a chasm between him and his world. When he cannot and will not allow himself to be drawn into the vortex of surrounding activities, this alienation causes injury to Diana, who is searching for a relationship of mutual trust, something of which Jeff, she learns, is not capable. Despite himself, Jeff is drawn to Ollie Rounds, and when Ollie is hanged for his part in the Plummer activities, Jeff suffers more than ever before. Still, the shock of his friend's death has a cathartic effect on Jeff, and he finally realizes that he has cut himself off from others, particularly from Diana. Irony works well when Jeff stubbornly maintains his substantial isolation but, all the while, he is being drawn toward the climactic lesson he learns in the death of Ollie.

In *Alder Gulch*, Haycox devotes considerable space to discussions of law and order. Although he omits harsh criticism of the Vigilantes, he jabs at individuals who withdraw, as Pierce does for a while, from communal responsibility. Individuality, Haycox implies, is sacred, but when carried to extremes it destroys the individual and the community. Clearly, freedom must not be determined entirely in

terms of one's personal feelings; it must be defined with the views of others in mind. This lesson Jeff Pierce learns in some of Haycox's best moral drama.

The year following the publication of *Alder Gulch*—1943—was the high point of Ernest Haycox's literary career. Most satisfying must have been his first appearance in *Saturday Evening Post*, an accomplishment he had looked forward to for twenty years. Besides, there was the rare triumph of having serials running concurrently in *Collier's* and the *Post*. The two serials paid Haycox more than \$50,000, and there was the added realization that they increased his solid reputation as one of the country's leading serial writers. Once it was obvious that *Collier's* would turn down Haycox's Custer novel, *Bugles in the Afternoon*, Sydney Sanders, Haycox's literary agent, sent the manuscript to the *Post*, where it was accepted after major revisions. Above all this, *Bugles* was immediately popular, receiving warm reviews and selling better than any previous Haycox novel.

Only *The Earthbreakers*, Haycox's last novel, ranks unquestionably in merit above *Bugles in the Afternoon*. As one would expect from Haycox, the work achieves its excellence not through experimental methods but through blending and polishing of those techniques employed in preceding creations. Altogether, this marriage of history and fiction proved to be Haycox's best historical Western and the apex of the second part of his career.

Bugles in the Afternoon is a fictional recreation of one of the West's most striking episodes—the battle of the Little Big Horn. Seen through the eyes of Kern Shafter, a thirty-two-year-old Civil War officer who rejoined the army in the late summer of 1875, the novel deals with the Seventh Cavalry and the events leading up to and through the famous defeat of General George A. Custer on 25 June 1876. Haycox may have become interested in Custer

soon after his university days and indulged that interest in the years preceding the writing of the Custer story. Indeed, the Custer materials are the most extensive collection of any Western subject in the Ernest Haycox Memorial Library at the University of Oregon Library.

In addition to writing a stirring narrative about Custer, Haycox includes considerable interpretation, especially about the controversial soldier. The author's point of view, as Kent Steckmesser has shown, bears the influence of Frederick F. Van de Water's critical biography *Glory Hunter: A Life of General Custer*, which appeared in 1934, one year after the death of Mrs. Custer. Haycox shares Van de Water's view that Custer's catastrophe was largely his own doing. They conclude that Custer was too impetuous, too irresponsible, that he was a "glory hunter."

This severe attitude toward Custer appears most clearly in Haycox's novel just before his description of the fateful date of 25 June. The author has Custer thinking about his past and the possibilities of the future. Then Haycox gives this lengthy interpretation of the commander:

He had a fighter's heart, this Custer, and a fighter's tremendous energy. He scorned the cautions which held other commanders back, he had a blind faith in the naked power of a cavalry charge. On dash and surprise and swiftness he had made himself a general out of a boy lieutenant in four years and he could not change now. Nor wanted to change. Impatience and restlessness and a self-faith that never wavered were the stars that shone brightest before him, and moved him and made him.

Custer had a "hunger for applause" that neither he nor any other could satiate. Although "he had a fighter's heart," he could not control his selfish ambitions. From Haycox's point of view, Custer

made the cardinal mistakes of dividing his troops, of underestimating the strength of his foes, and of not waiting for Gibbon and Crook because these blunders were typical of him; only his "luck" had saved him from earlier disaster.

Other portions of the novel—those dealing with Kern Shafter—are woven skillfully into the fabric of Custer's affairs. Shafter, it is true, devotes much of his energy to winning the attentions of Josephine Russell and in gaining revenge over his old enemy Edward Garnett; but these actions are nearly always linked to his maneuvers in the Seventh Cavalry. Before Shafter comes to the Dakota Territory, he has not known Custer, but in his first weeks at Fort Lincoln, he observes his commander's behavior and shares the insecure feelings of his fellow soldiers toward Custer. Once spring blossoms and the time for the promised attack on the Sioux arrives, Shafter, like the others, fears an impending tragedy. When his group embarks on its month-long march, Shafter carries along his hatred of Garnett, love for Josephine, and fear of Custer. But his feelings are blended into the stream of historical events, and this interlacing of the individual and general enlarges the meaning of the narrative. Since Shafter is the fictional hero and cannot lose his life, he is assigned to troop A, part of the cavalry under the command of Reno. He survives, although seriously wounded, while Garnett, a victim of a Sioux charge, loses his life. One day later, Gibbon appears and rescues Reno's beleaguered forces. Shafter, along with the other wounded, is put aboard the *Far West* and returned to Fort Lincoln. At the end, Josephine looks after Kern, who is saddened and still dazed by his experience in the Custer tragedy.

Many readers were enthusiastic about *Bugles in the Afternoon*. One reviewer commented that the author was faithful to history and that his interpretation of Custer was particularly engaging, since the debacle at the Little Big Horn "might better have been

called the Battle of the Little Big Shot" (Baron Ireland, *Springfield Republican*, 13 Feb. 1944: 7E). Another commentator, John K. Hutchens, though admitting a prejudice against Westerns, thought it an excellent piece and certainly Haycox's best novel. These favorable opinions still predominate. In a paper read before the third annual conference of the Western History Association, Noel M. Loomis, a novelist and English professor, termed it "one of the best all-around novels of our time" (Salt Lake City, 19 Oct. 1963). And many authorities on Western American literature agree with Steckmesser, who praises the novel as "one of the best historical Westerns ever written" (228).

Had Ernest Haycox been a less sedulous writer he might have been content with his position in 1944. He had gained entrance to *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Bugles in the Afternoon* was receiving wider critical attention than any of his previous novels. Some reviewers even suggested that he had advanced beyond the Western and was on the verge of becoming a historical novelist. But Haycox wanted more, as a discussion of his beliefs about writing, published in the *Writer's Digest* in 1942, reveals.

"Sir Walter, Excepting" particularly illuminates the shifts in Haycox's thinking about his craft. He continues to maintain that literature is written, first of all, to be read and thus that this qualification should determine its shape and content. Still, authors are more craftsmen than artists, and contenders for art for art's sake are likely to be as superficial and false as blatantly commercial writers. At the same time Haycox stresses a "sense of feeling" and "visualization," which he maintains will help to develop mature characters. And if an author is to write a quality novel he must not overlook the use of indirection to play up the drama and tension of his story. Fighting, feuding, and fussing are not enough; while bare-fisted clashes have their place, so does the flickering eyelash.

In addition, the author must see the action from the viewpoint of several characters and not let his ideas dominate the scene. These items, once united in a loose but meaningful form, would allow for a "panoramic novel" with broad implications. These statements prefigure the trends of Haycox's writing in the remaining years of his life. As his philosophy of composition was undergoing change, he was trying to bring his writings into line with these innovations. The close association between credo and practice helps explain Haycox's final years, his "period of revolt."

Published in 1945, *Canyon Passage*, Haycox's second and last novel in *Saturday Evening Post*, was his final serial. The work is a clear attempt to sketch out, in serial form, his "panoramic novel." With more characters than any previous work, *Canyon Passage* tries to present each figure as a varied and believable type, achieving a broad rather than deep landscape.

The novel focuses on Jacksonville, an Oregon frontier mining town, which furnishes an ideal setting for the interplay of raw and sometimes brutal human emotions. Not only do the white settlers have to fight raiding parties of Rogues, who are bent on revenge for the intrusion of the miners and homesteaders on their land, but they also have to dispose of undesirables among their own group: Honey Bragg, animal-like robber; Jack Lestrade, gambling parasite; and George Camrose, weak idealist who steals and murders to cover up his inadequacies.

Haycox also deals with what the frontier, as a region distinct from others, might mean to an individual. For Logan Stuart, the hero, it offers opportunity, if a man is sufficiently pliable to bend with its changing forces. The heroine, Lucy Overmire, shares this pragmatic approach to the environment. They realize the possibilities of success because they know when to fight back and when to drift with the stream. But Camrose is impractical. Not willing to

accept any of the distasteful aspects of this new existence, he either wages war against his milieu or falls into the slough of despond. Bragg, in another manner, is equally unable to adjust to Jacksonville society. A mountain man with anarchistic backgrounds, he fails to adapt to the new surroundings, although Haycox has difficulty in presenting his struggles in a satisfactory manner.

Despite its abundant action and character study, *Canyon Passage* is not an effective work. That it should be distinctly inferior to *Bugles in the Afternoon* is an interesting comment on Haycox's career. A few months previous to the serial appearance of the Jacksonville novel Haycox wrote to Thacher, mentioning the comments of an Eastern reviewer. The commentator, on the staff of the *New York Times*, sent his criticisms directly to Little, Brown and Company and pointed out, among other things, the irregular quality of Haycox's writing. The critic argued that Haycox was a "spotty writer, [and] somewhat unpredictable." He "would excite him with one piece of work, and disappoint him with the next." Haycox concurred with this criticism but made no move to defend himself, as he did on other points. One suspects that he was aware of the inadequacies of *Canyon Passage*.

The failure of the southern Oregon novel raises questions concerning the historical Western. Three of Haycox's previous historical Westerns—*Trouble Shooter*, *Alder Gulch*, and *Bugles in the Afternoon*—contained several vignettes of historical personages, inclusions that contributed much to the reality of the novels. *Canyon Passage*, however, contains no such characters, forcing the imagined characters to carry the realism of the novel. The burden is too much for them, particularly since the author, in the same limited space, has introduced so many figures. For the lack of a really believable hero, heroine, or villain, the novel fails. The three previous historical Westerns had another advantage in that each has a plot

following closely a recorded historical incident. The drama of the building of the Union Pacific, the tension of the events surrounding the hanging of Henry Plummer, and the tragedy of the slaughter of Custer's forces come primarily from the flow of historical occurrences. The story of Logan Stuart has no factual basis, and the author has therefore to create nearly all the story. Like *The Border Trumpet*, *Canyon Passage* may pass for a general picture of an era, largely because of the author's descriptions of pack trains, stage coaches, and the life in Jacksonville. Although the use of small details adds to the novel's strength, they cannot atone, in this instance, for its several weaknesses. The continued appearance of stock characters indicates that Haycox had not yet avoided the formula of the Western.

From the early months of 1944 until near the end of 1946 Haycox went through the most uncertain days of his literary career. Not because his market had narrowed nor because he found it impossible to repeat his previous successes; in fact, the pages of *Collier's* and the *Post* were still open to his serials and his shorter pieces, and editors of these magazines were even asking for more Haycox material. Haycox's discontent came from another direction. Finally driving himself to the point where he could no longer vacillate, he had to come up with something different. For a man of Haycox's cautious temperament this time of revolt was an especially trying period.

A number of signs betrayed Haycox's uncertainties. For one, he told his former teacher that while he would abandon the formula Western and, conversely, stress character development, he was unsure whether he ought to write more historical Westerns, even though his most recent and best work was of that type. The question of form also disturbed Haycox. Perhaps he would have to abandon the serial market to accomplish what he hoped. Possibly,

he thought, he could follow the broad-canvas of *Les Miserables* or *Lorna Doone*. Here were classic adventure stories that provided easy-to-follow plots. Or, maybe John F. Marquand's new novel *So Little Time*, with its focus on one central character instead of several, was the answer, although Haycox argued that he wanted more action and structure than the novel contained.

Other evidences indicate that Haycox's long-followed routines were breaking up. While *Collier's* had published most of his writings during the past decade, he now placed shorter pieces in such journals as *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *American Legion*, and later in *True* and *Esquire*. And he began to read, for the first time, the works of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner as well as those of other popular and Western writers. He also returned to Hollywood in 1945-46 to work on several scripts even though he had vowed he would not do so again after an earlier unsatisfactory experience.

The writing of *Long Storm* (1946) illustrates Haycox's turmoil and frustration. The problem of a new form bothered him most. This novel set in Portland of the 1860s had begun as another serial for the *Post*, but at the end of thirty pages, Haycox found it impossible to make his major figure, Adam Musick, conform to the serial format. Adam had too much to say; he was too ready to reflect on the social and economic conditions of Portland during the Civil War. If the loquacity of Adam could not be eliminated, maybe he would have to drop the serial form altogether.

By fall of 1944 a nearly completed first draft was sent off to Thacher with the request that he struggle through the bad writing and give his initial reactions. Most of all, the writer asked, did the ideas of Musick have validity, or were they sophomoric nonsense? While Haycox had sent another copy to his agent, he was certain that Sanders would encourage him to stick to the serial and work

out his new ideas within its formula. Although Haycox did not wish to be bound to any particular form, he was committed to change—so much so, in fact, that he was willing to forego the serial price of \$25,000 if he could achieve an artistic success outside its structures.

Although Thacher's first reactions are not extant, they can be largely deduced from subsequent correspondence. He and Sanders agreed that the work, as it stood, was unsuccessful. Both termed the unfinished project a hybrid: a combination of the serial and the novel. Haycox had tried to graft a series of reflective characters upon an action plot, and it had not worked. In this connection Thacher disliked the "introverted way of presenting people." To this demur Haycox answered that he had consciously changed his methods to allow the major characters to think for themselves rather than merely to present them in a series of action scenes. The new approach contained pitfalls, for frequently there was too much thinking and not enough acting. Yet he was slowly moving toward what he wanted.

By 1945, then, the decisive conclusion was made; the serial market was to be abandoned, and with that problem solved the rest would be more easily resolved. Why the change came is not entirely clear. Possibly Thacher encouraged him to rectify the inadequacies of the work, or perhaps he made the decision himself. At any rate, the innovation was apparent and signaled the third stage of his career.

Two months before the publication of *Long Storm*, Haycox announced that he was ready to cut down on his outside activities and get back into the writing groove. He wanted to write another novel about Oregon in the Civil War era. It would be a panoramic piece, not an attempt to write another serial. Since the Book League had chosen *Long Storm* as one of its future selections and assured Haycox of at least a 200,000 circulation, he could be more cavalier

about abandoning the serial markets.

By mid-summer of 1946, the outline for the new novel, already titled "The Adventurers," was taking shape. In addition to taking full notes on setting, characters, and plot, Haycox wanted his chief motif to draw on the title, arguing that all humans were "adventurers" in an uncertain world. The only things that might redeem men and women from a complete chance existence were two important human qualities: courage and kindness. Courage could help them to endure their situation, and acts of kindness might even allow them a measure of success.

The search of the four major characters—Mark Sheridan, George Revelwood, Clara Dale, and Katherine Morvain—for self-realization becomes the central focus of *The Adventurers*. They present four distinct facades, although Mark and Katherine resemble one another more than Clara and George. None is convinced of what his or her quest will lead to but all, at first, feel the necessity of continuing. The personality of each paves the way for the success or failure of the adventure.

Mark Sheridan, like many Haycox heroes, is an ambitious young man bent on conquest, though he senses that his own strength will determine his victory. Suave and cautious, Revelwood is more hesitant when facing difficult circumstances. The most selfish and the most tragic figure, Clara does not realize the nature of her disproportionate desires until too late. Katherine, however, epitomizes determination. Above all else, she wishes to lift her family above its abject poverty. Katherine and Mark are durable enough to succeed eventually, though they fail on several occasions. But the demands of Oregon life in the 1860s are too arduous for George and Clara, so they come to tragic ends. The environment makes just as harsh demands on Mark and Katherine as on George and Clara, but the latter couple lack the necessary foresight, adaptabil-

ity, and tenacity. And they expect too much. Their desire for complete happiness and fulfillment is excessive; this, Mark and Katherine know and avoid. In the game of life, Haycox seems to imply, individuals have only a few trump cards, and they will lose most of their rounds. Those who strive to take every trick are bound to feel strongly their sense of failure. Instead, all must seize their fleeting moments of happiness and steel themselves against inevitable disappointments.

The tone in Haycox's penultimate novel is predominantly somber. For instance, Clara and George come to tragic ends because they cannot adjust to the harsh demands put upon them. George kills a man he thinks has seduced Clara; and she, alone and isolated, takes her life after realizing the emptiness of her desires. Failure leaves its marks too on Mark and Katherine. He sees several business ventures collapse and his affection for George and Clara crushed while Katherine first loses her youngest brother, for whom she has special fondness, and later two other brothers. Only the love that Katherine and Mark share allows them a measure of satisfaction, and they sense that the future will hold continued distress and setbacks. In Haycox's world one cannot hope for much more.

After a period of inactivity, Haycox turned his attention again to the magazines. While struggling with the form and content of *The Adventurers*, he was also busy writing short pieces, and in the fifteen-month period between December 1947 and February 1949, he placed twelve short stories, a substantial output considering that he had published only eleven in the previous four years. Of these, four appeared in *Saturday Evening Post* and seven in *Collier's*.

Several of these shorter works herald topics and character types utilized in Haycox's final novel, *The Earthbreakers*. A major interest is the pioneering experience. In "No Time for Dreams" (*Saturday Evening Post* 6 Dec. 1947), a young woman learns that dreaming

for the ideal husband is impractical in a demanding environment; so she accepts the proposal of Ben McLane, less dashing but more dependable than Abbott Corning. Another story, "Snow in the Camp" (*Collier's* 17 Jan. 1948) revolves around three ideas: freedom, leadership, and love. Young Tom Rowly accompanies a wagon train entering the last, treacherous miles of its overland journey to Oregon. By turns, the settlers are cautious, hopeful, and angry. And Tom shares these changing moods. Attracted to Teresa Hunt, he wonders if her social achievements will dovetail with his plebeian backgrounds. He thinks too about the liberty of the individual to do as he pleases (when one wagon challenges the freedom of the rest) and decides that one cannot allow a single person to destroy the future for all. That decision leads to a fight and the taking on of responsibility. In this area he learns much from a wagon captain willing to vote and to abide by the majority opinion. Finally, Tom perceives that the experiences in which they have participated bridge the gulf of social distinctions; Teresa is more than willing to take him for a husband.

Several stories, one of which is "On Bakeoven Grade" (*Collier's* 17 July 1948), deal with pioneer women. John Whitman, his wife, and their daughter Ellen, who is blossoming into womanhood, operate a stage station in eastern Oregon. Web Gordon, a solid and practical rancher's son, is courting Ellen; but to Ellen he seems too plodding and unromantic. He works steadily and finds little time to take her to dances, so she accepts the invitation of Ek Long, the dashing but impulsive stage driver who has his way with women. This rash act on Ellen's part upsets her father and Web, but wins the latter to her perspective. A concomitant problem is Mrs. Whitman's growing dissatisfaction with the lonely and dreary life of the stage station. She sides with Ellen and vicariously relives her own lost girlhood. But when Whitman hires another couple

and Mrs. Whitman finds rivalry in the kitchen, the complaints about lonesomeness are forgotten in the rush to rid the household of culinary competition.

Three of the stories center on the John Mercy family, which, if the name were changed, could easily be the central family in Haycox's final novel. The first of the Mercy stories, "Cry Deep, Cry Still" (*Collier's* 20 Nov. 1948), treats the dilemma of a pioneer woman who must serve as father and mother while her husband is gone for eight days. The "Cry Deep" portion allows memories to suggest how things could have been different had she stayed at home and married a different man. But "Cry Still" portrays the plucky woman facing her circumstances, putting other ideas out of her mind, and remaining constant to her husband and family. "Call This Land Home" (*Saturday Evening Post* 4 Dec. 1948) presents the pioneering experience through the consciousness of Tom (Thomas Jackson) Mercy, the eight-year-old son of John Mercy. In the early days of settlement he shares with his family the incessant rain, the building of a cabin, the injury of his father, and the stillbirth of a little brother. All of these happenings shape his outlook and allow him to "call this land home." A third approach to the Mercy family is through the viewpoint of John Mercy, the father, in "Violent Interlude" (*Saturday Evening Post* 17 May 1952). He finds that Si Rees, an ex-mountain man now living in Oregon country with his two squaws, challenges the right of the Mercy family to settle on what he calls his land. At first Mercy is inclined to leave; but Rees's continual provocations turn John to "playing catamount," and he takes a "piece of bark off" his unruly neighbor. Like the other two accounts of the Mercy family, this story is a persuasive description of the tribulations and satisfactions of a settler family. The stories are, as one observer pointed out, "moving" and the characterizations "solid and believable" (*Saturday Review*

of *Literature* 17 May 1952: 40).

Sometime during the last two or three years of his life Haycox came to the project that would occupy the remainder of his literary career. Since the early part of 1944 nearly all of his fiction had dealt with Oregon. Now he formulated a plan to cover the history of his state from 1840 until the turn of the century in three volumes of fiction. He had great hopes for the project since it would not only delineate important occurrences in the region's history but also embody his best writing. If he were to leave something for posterity it would be in his trilogy of historical novels about the Oregon country.

The Earthbreakers is, in one sense, a summary of the last fifteen years of Haycox's literary career. It is, first of all, the closest he came to the "panoramic" novel he had promised as early as 1937. It is, again, historical fiction on the broad scale with emphasis on character conflict and some recounting of historical fact. More than this, it deals with man and his world, an emphasis that had become increasingly important to Haycox after the publication of *Bugles in the Afternoon*. He hoped, as he mentioned in 1948, that the novel would be an escape from his earlier novels and an "explanation of this little figure crawling on the earth whom we call man—so little and so potentially great" (quoted in V.L.O. Chittick, *Northwest Harvest* 39).

The story of a group of pioneers completing their long trek overland and entering the Oregon Territory in 1845, the novel carries them through one year of existence: the choosing of land, the building of cabins, the establishing of a frontier settlement, and the clash of manifold interests that are bound to arise in the revelation of the human situation. The novel is one narrative containing many stories, as the author weaves in the many relationships that are established and frequently dissects the characters involved.

Yet *The Earthbreakers* is primarily the story of Rice Burnett. At the center of the novel, Rice is implicated, implicitly or explicitly, in many of the relationships established among the other characters. He has decided to abandon his anarchic past as a trapper and to build a grist mill in a new settlement. Of a similar background is Cal Lockyear, also an ex-mountain man, who has come along to Oregon. But the reactions of Lockyear to the new circumstances reflect an attitude toward civilization far different from that of Burnett. A third mountain man, Bob Hawn, has preceded the other two and has become a "squaw man." His confrontation with the immigrants illustrates still another reaction.

Along the trail westward Burnett becomes interested in Edna Lattimore, as restless and ardent a woman as Haycox ever portrayed. She wants a man and makes little attempt to disguise her desires for Rice. A more difficult woman for Rice to comprehend is Katherine Gay, the quiet and composed daughter of John Gay, the nominal leader of the group of settlers. A large part of the plot deals with the choice that Rice has to make between these two women.

The ruminations of Rice Burnett provide the clearest glimpse of what Haycox has to say about the game of life and the roles that participants ought to play. A man, Rice thinks, must understand Nature and play the cards she has dealt him; if he does not, everything will seem senselessly tragic. The final scene in the novel dramatizes this idea. The death of Katherine's father, John Gay, who has led the group until the rise of Rice, occurs at the same moment that Rice and Katherine agree on marriage. The tragedy of the elder Gay's death must be seen in the light of the younger couple's carrying on the content and force of his life. One vessel is destroyed, but the important life fluid is transferred to new ones.

Burnett is the most fully drawn of all of Haycox's fictional characters. Prior to this protagonist, all Haycox heroes were confined within a rigid code of sexual morality. No doubt the author's previous reluctance to allow more than a flickering doubt or two in the hero's mind concerning his sexual relations with the leading women results from Haycox's adherence to the conservative traditions of the Western. But even in *Long Storm* and *The Adventurers*, Adam Musick and Mark Sheridan are kept from any indiscretions, although such possibilities are available. Not so with Rice. He succumbs to his own passions as well as to the elemental desires of Edna. That he should do so seems consistent with his other actions. Clearly, his character, when compared to that of Haycox's earlier heroes, is not the result of dividing all men into the white and black hats. More complex, more ambiguous, Rice is not merely a stock Western hero. Revealing in this connection are his musings about his relations with Edna. He thinks of her needs and desire for fulfillment and feels her presence.

She came to him now as she had so many nights before; she settled warm-flanked beside him, laughing a little, whispering. This was the imperative reverie of a lone man, flesh's need tangled through the soul's need so that as he used her he endowed her with grace. Without grace it was brutal; without flesh it was bloodless. Lot White [the preacher] would have said that one was evil and the other perfection, but Lot was wrong, they were not two separate things, they were parts of one thing and so long as he was alive these alternate thrusts would have their way; the conflict had been built into him and he could no more change it than he could chop himself in halves and live.

Men, Rice thinks, are combinations of good and evil. This principle of the complexity of human nature had not come easily for Haycox,

but once accepted, it posed exciting possibilities.

Without a doubt, *The Earthbreakers* is Haycox's best work. It portrays universal themes—love, hate, and jealousy—in a convincing fashion. It treats the specifics of existence in remote Oregon during the 1840s. It combines the active and contemplative moods of its characters in a smoothly wrought manner, and it avoids the largest fault of the Western: action for action's sake. In short, it combines the impact of the general and particular, of good and evil, and of active and reflective. Not a Western, it is a novel of the West.

In April 1949, Haycox signed a contract with his publisher for the publication of *The Earthbreakers*, and the following March he sent east a first draft. Two months later he was in the hospital for abdominal surgery, which revealed he had incurable cancer. A second operation in August proved unsuccessful, and Haycox suffered a serious relapse in early October. Death followed on 14 October.

In the nearly four decades since Haycox's death, specialists in Western American literature have frequently dismissed his works as well as other Westerns as not worthy of consideration. Sometimes convinced that the formula Western is a species of bastardized subliterature, these commentators fail to see the genre as a revealing form of popular culture. Such has not been the case, however, with students of American popular culture who in the last generation or so have scrutinized the Western for its illustrations of American experiences.

For example, nearly two decades ago John G. Cawelti, pioneering scholar in the study of popular culture, provocatively noted the importance of viewing the Western as a barometer of shifting beliefs in the United States. First in a series of essays, then in *Six-Gun Mystique*, and later in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, Cawelti argued that writers such as Zane Grey, Ernest Haycox, and Louis L'Amour often revealed changes in public opinion about such con-

cepts as individualism, heroism, community, and violence. Urging that students of American literature and culture must rethink their negative attitudes toward popular literary types, Cawelti provided analytical paradigms for approaching popular literature, scholarly approaches that influenced markedly subsequent studies of the Western.

More recently Christine Bold employs other useful tools for discussing writers like Haycox, especially their links to publishers and readers of dime novels and pulp Westerns. Briefly chronicling Haycox's rise as a popular novelist, she concludes that he timidly replaced attitudes widespread in the pulps with the more Darwinistic, naturalistic perspectives of his final novels. Meanwhile, in an abbreviated survey of Haycox's life, major themes, and commentaries on his works, Robert L. Gale concludes that Haycox "was responsible for lifting western fiction . . . out of the formulaic pattern inherited from Owen Wister, Zane Grey, Max Brand, and others less capable and for making it a new vehicle" (183). Other writers such as Michael T. Marsden, Richard W. Etulain, and Jon Tuska have also traced and evaluated Haycox's notable role in the development of the Western.

Drawing on these recent scholarly studies and from the evidence presented here, one can make several points in evaluating the literary career of Ernest Haycox. First of all, his gradual movement from the pulp magazines of the 1920s to the slicks in the 1930s and 40s and his abandonment of the serial Western in the late 1940s illustrate the major markets available to those writing Westerns as well as disclose the steps in his own literary career. Moreover, as a person of large ambition but cautious temperament, Haycox was ideally suited for the Western: he could tinker with its format without having to make quick, decisive changes. Further, unlike other writers of Westerns such as Zane Grey and Luke Short,

Haycox was not a static writer; his career clearly reflected ongoing refinements in his craft.

At the same time, not until the final years of his career did Haycox come to recognize the American West as a unique literary region worthy of exploitation. Tied to the formula Western of action, adventure, and stereotyped characters in the first twenty-five years of his career, he was unable to break from this formulaic pattern until his closing years. In some of his short stories and serials of the 1940s, but especially in *The Earthbreakers*, Haycox adopted a regionalistic vision in asking how the climate, terrain, and unique experiences of the Pacific Northwest shaped the lives of people residing in that region. While he never provided a clear articulation of this emerging regionalism in the last three or four years of his life, Haycox was clearly on the verge of joining such writers as H. L. Davis and A. B. Guthrie, Jr., as notable regional writers of the Pacific Northwest.

Ironically, however, other writers who have praised Haycox's writings have usually pointed to his earlier serials or historical Westerns rather than to his regional fiction as his most significant accomplishments. Old pro Luke Short (Frederick Glidden) was particularly drawn to Haycox's effective use of setting, mood, and dialogue in his Westerns in *Collier's*, while Frank Gruber, another veteran of the Western, admitted that he had read all of Haycox's novels as something of a beginning course in writing the Western. A third formula writer, D. E. Newton, was even more emphatic, declaring that Haycox's influence was "decisive . . . for an entire generation" of writers of popular Westerns ("Letter to a Graduate Student," *The Roundup* 13 [1965]: 5-6). And when the Western Writers of America was established in the early 1950s, so great was the influence of Haycox that they seriously considered giving "Ernies" as annual awards for the best Western of that year.

While these prizes subsequently became known as Spur Awards, members of the WWA continue to rank Haycox and his novels, especially a historical Western like *Bugles in the Afternoon*, as among the best Westerns ever written.

So evolved the literary career of Ernest Haycox. Commencing his treatment of the West within the prescriptions of a popular literary mode, he slowly refined the methods of his craft, along the way adding techniques that gave his Westerns a distinctive quality. Emphasizing history and character conflict, he began to write historical Westerns. Finally, in the most important break of his career, he tried to produce a significant Western regional novel. Unfortunately, he died before he could achieve the large goal of his last years. Haycox's growth was gradual, but his development illustrates an author determined enough to defy popular demands and honest enough to write fiction consistent with his changing literary beliefs.

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The following bibliography is a very selective listing of works by Haycox as well as material published about his writings. For fuller bibliographies, see Jill Haycox and John Chord, "Ernest Haycox Fiction—A Checklist," *The Call Number* [University of Oregon Library] 10 (Fall 1963-Spring 1964): 4-27; and Richard W. Etulain, "The Literary Career of a Western Writer: Ernest Haycox, 1899-1950," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1966.

NOVELS

Until *Deep West*, all of Haycox's novels were published by Doubleday, Doran and Company of Garden City, New York. After 1937, Little, Brown and Company of Boston became his publisher. Dates in parentheses are those of serial publications.

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Chaffee of Roaring Horse, 1930 (*West* 30 Oct. to 25 Dec. 1929).
Whispering Range, 1931 (*West* 15 Oct. to 10 Dec. 1930).
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Riders West, 1934 (*Short Stories* 10 Mar. to 25 Apr. 1934).
Rough Air, 1934 (*Collier's* 17 Feb. to 21 Apr. 1934).
The Silver Desert, 1934 (*Collier's* 17 Aug. to 19 Oct. 1935).
Trail Smoke, 1936 (*Collier's* 23 Nov. 1935 to 25 Jan. 1936).
Trouble Shooter, 1937 (*Collier's* 20 June to 22 Aug. 1936).
Deep West, 1937 (*Collier's* 2 Jan. to 20 Feb. 1937).
Sundown Jim, 1938 (*Collier's* 25 Sept. to 27 Nov. 1937).
Man in the Saddle, 1938 (*Collier's* 2 Apr. to 28 May 1938).
The Border Trumpet, 1939 (*Collier's* 29 Apr. to 1 July 1939).
Saddle and Ride, 1940 (*Collier's* 16 Dec. 1939 to 17 Feb. 1940).
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