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The Early Novel of the Southwest

by Edwin W. Gaston, Jr.

THE HURLY-BURLY of the early Southwest captured the fancy of novelists who saw exciting ingredients for fiction in the explorations of Spanish Conquistadores, in the establishment of settlements, in conflicts between various ethnic groups of the region, and in the daily round of frontier life.

This study, a critical history of fictional writing of the Southwest, focuses primarily upon forty representative novels written between 1819 and 1918. Beginning with the earliest novel of the area, *L'Heroine du Texas*, by an anonymous Frenchman, and closing with *The Desire of the Moth* by cowboy-novelist Eugene Manlove Rhodes, the author covers the representative novels dating between these two works.

The novelists were chiefly Anglo-Americans, although there were several exceptions including Frederick Marryat, the critical caustic Englishman who wrote *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet*, and Adolph F. Bandelier, archæologist-author of *The Delight Makers*. The writers preferred to cloak their fancy with fact, as in Amelia E. Barr's *Remember The Alamo* and Prentiss Ingraham's *Buffalo Bill and the Robber Ranch King*. Nature was glorified somewhat in the vein of Chateaubriand, and the treatment of Indians was influenced by James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. Charles King's *An Apache Princess* and Marah Ellis Ryan's *The Flute of the Gods* typify the "noble savage" school in the Southwest novel.

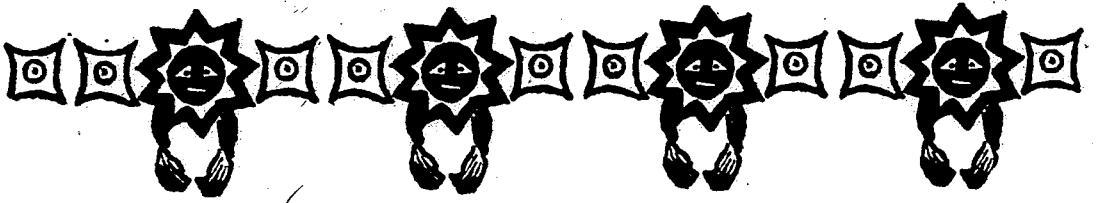
Novels depicting swashbuckling deeds by heroic adventurers and hair-raising exploits of the mountain men and trappers, *Old Hicks the Guide*, by Charles W. Webber, and *Mustang Gray*, by Jeremiah Clemens, are among this group. The local-color novel is a genre almost to itself: *Under the Man-Fig*, by M. E. M. Davis and *Sonny*, by Ruth Stuart, may be singled out.

Dr. Gaston also isolates minor facets of the Southwest novel: the development of the "frontier flower" woman, the character of the adventurer, attitudes toward Catholicism and priests. He analyzes the minor devices of technique—the postscript method of supplying an end to the story, digressions, and the adoption of journalistic, epistolary, and dramatic styles. An important part of the work discusses plot type and method, point of view, focus, and dialogue. A valuable and interesting section of the book is the Appendix, which contains synopses of the forty principal novels and biographies of their authors.

EDWIN W. GASTON, JR. calls himself "the product of institutional inbreeding." Born in Nacogdoches, Texas, the site of Stephen F. Austin College which he says "has conferred upon me the B.S. and the M.A. degrees in English, as well as employment for the past decade," he holds the Ph.D. in American Studies from Texas Technological College in Lubbock. His research papers and reviews have appeared in *The Texas Journal of Science*; *The Texas Outlook*; *Singers and Storytellers* (the 1960 publication of the Texas Folklore Society), and *New Mexico Quarterly*. Now associate professor of English at Stephen F. Austin, he is at work on a follow-up to *The Early Novel of the Southwest*, studying the modern novel and novelists of the region.

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