

## ANGLE OF REPOSE

by Wallace Stegner

Doubleday, 569 pp., \$7.95

Reviewed by Glendy Culligan

■ "Angle of repose" is a geological term for the diminished incline that halts a landslide. In Wallace Stegner's ambitious exploration of the nineteenth-century American West it connotes both the profession of the hero—a mining engineer—and the uneasy truce in which all paired opposites rest.

The title implies a larger meaning, a point Stegner makes in a note to his publisher, quoted on the book's jacket: "It is neither an 'historical' nor a 'pioneer' novel although it covers four generations in the life of an American family (1860-1970). . . ." Twentieth-century critical theory urges the reader to be wary of intentions; yet, like the protest of Hamlet's mother, such denials make us wonder what is really being avowed. Are the types of fiction that Stegner mentions somehow inferior? If so, what are their negative characteristics? And how does he manage to bypass them?

Although set in a frame that contrasts different contemporary values, the novel's core details life in a sequence of mining camps during the 1870s and 1880s. Superficially, it complies with Webster's definition of a historical novel as one "having as its setting a period of history and introducing some historical personages and events." Lyman Ward, the crippled historian who serves as narrator, scrutinizes those years in his grandparents'

lives for clues to his own emotional depletion. From them he learns that "wisdom is knowing what you have to accept."

Those key words suggest the difference between Stegner's thrust and that of the usual period romance. Neither the acts nor artifacts of the westward migration interest him as much as its meaning for us, its heirs, who also suffer to some degree Lyman Ward's stiffened bones and attitudes. There are no trigger fingers in this essentially domestic chronicle. Cowboys, sheriffs, and Indians remain in the wings; the Battle of the Little Bighorn is dismissed with a passing reference. Nothing could be more alien to Wallace Stegner's art, as expressed in his meticulously wrought fiction over three decades, than escapist melodrama.

"Regional novels," on the other hand, are typically realistic—Stegner's consistent mode in many prize-winning short stories and in *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*. Stylistic habits are not easily overthrown, even though the "realist" label has depreciated since the 1940s; and Stegner continues to build with patient detail in the present novel. At the same time, in scope and structure he does transcend the landscape of his personal past. Neither East nor West is the true region of his novel, but rather the human soul and the tension between its poles. Early in his exploration of old family papers, Lyman Ward lists the opposites that his grandparents epitomized: "A masculine and a feminine. A romantic and a realist. A woman who was more lady than woman, and a man who was more man than gentleman." Scholar that he is, he might have added the concepts

"genteel tradition" and "pioneer quest."

In concrete terms this schism meant that Grandmother Ward was incorrigibly refined and that her heart "bled Eastward," while Grandfather Ward, an inventor at ease with the untried, plunged wholeheartedly into "the picnic West." What interests their grandson is "how such unlike particles clung together, and under what strains, rolling downhill into their future until they reached the angle of repose where I knew them."

His interest invites our own, for in the absolute sense his grandparents are universal progenitors. They refute, among other "dubious assumptions about the early West," the legend that it was "made entirely by pioneers who had thrown everything away but an ax and a gun." Oliver Ward left Yale only because of bad eyesight, while Susan Ward, who "put a higher value on gentility than those who were bred to it," carried books and amenities to the most isolated canyons. In roaring Leadville her mountain cabin became a salon for such "historical personages" as Helen Hunt Jackson and Clarence King, the latter fresh from converse with his old friend Henry Adams.

That salon graced a peak in every sense. More often in Susan's travels the word was spelled "saloon." It was a time when America needed greening less than gentling. Between the coasts much of the continent was still an appalling expanse of "empty plains . . . raw cutbanks . . . flooded creeks" punctuated by "ugly barren little towns" where mud and bad manners mingled.

The daughter of poor Quakers, schooled in the art of the pre-Raphaelites, Susan had modeled her dream of upward mobility on her friend Augusta Drake, niece of a poet and bred to wealth, to whom Susan addressed sentimental effusions that force her modern grandson to wonder about Victorian sexuality. Ironically, Augusta snapped up the only suitor who might have elevated Susan, leaving her to her engineer and exile.

It is in his portrait of the taciturn surveyor that Stegner departs most radically from romantic stereotypes. Nephew of Henry Ward Beecher and cousin of Mrs. Stowe, Oliver Ward lacks the verbal wizardry of his famous kin but shares their idealism, a severe liability in the raw new land of mineral speculators and claim-jumpers. "He was a builder, not a raider," his grandson later reflects. Thus, despite ingenuity, he was assured of financial failure. Often his wife's earnings as illustrator for the Eastern magazines filled their larder. To Susan Ward, Oliver's negligence of claims

(Continued on page 34)

## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by David M. Glixon

### O N H I G H

Each of these characters was involved with one of the mountains or ranges listed in Column Two. Martha E. M. Evans of State College, Pa., wants you to make the right geographical connections, and identify each character with his creator. If the going gets tough, take refuge on page 36.

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|---------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Bilbo Baggins ( )      | A. Alps        | a. Bulwer-Lytton |
| 2. Hans Castorp ( )       | B. Andes       | b. Bunyan        |
| 3. Christian ( )          | C. Blue Ridge  | c. Doyle         |
| 4. Hugh Conway ( )        | D. Catskills   | d. Goethe        |
| 5. Faust ( )              | E. Delectable  | e. Hemingway     |
| 6. Eugene Gant ( )        | F. Harz        | f. Hilton        |
| 7. Glaucus ( )            | G. Himalayas   | g. Irving        |
| 8. Professor Hardwigg ( ) | H. Kilimanjaro | h. Mann          |
| 9. Harry ( )              | I. Misty       | i. Tolkien       |
| 10. Jefferson Hope ( )    | J. Nevada      | j. Verne         |
| 11. Doña Maria ( )        | K. Sneffels    | k. Wilder        |
| 12. Rip Van Winkle ( )    | L. Vesuvius    | l. Wolfe         |

## Make No Mystique About It

by ZENA SUTHERLAND

**T**he women of the book world are on the march. Articles in mass magazines are warning mothers about the importance of early impressions of sex roles. There are many more books about boys and men than there are about girls and women, says Ann Eliasberg in "Are You Hurting Your Daughter Without Knowing It?" (*Family Circle*, February 1971). The female characters, she adds, are usually vapid and passive.

In the March 1971 *Woman's Day* another concerned mother, Marion Meade, announces, "Miss Muffet Must Go," and notes that picture books almost invariably portray mothers in their role of cook, laundress, and cleaning woman. She does, however, in a bibliography of approved books, cite one picture book: Eve Merriam's *Mommies at Work* (Knopf, \$3.95). Mothers, the book points out, build bridges, direct television programs, and repair radios. They also bake cookies, "... and all mommies [love] best of all to be your very own mommy and [come] home to you!" There's a working mother in *City in Winter*, by Eleanor Schick (Macmillan, \$4.95), and I'd be willing to bet that in the next few years we will see more and more of them in children's books. But I fear that some of them will be pedestrian, turned out to meet the demand.

There's no question about the paucity of picture books with girls as protagonists, and there are certainly so few whose heroines are adventurous that these stand out. We still have a plethora of girls with dolls, girls with kittens, and girls who help with the new baby just like a little mommy. As antidote, there's the Betsy Byars book (reviewed below) in which a boy looks after the baby. Or M. B. Goffstein's *The Two Piano Tuners* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$3.50), whose inflexible heroine is determined to pursue her grandfather's career.

In most books for young children the image of a girl as sedate and home-oriented is subtle, but there are some in which the message is blatant. Whitney Darrow's *I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl!* (Windmill/Simon & Schuster, \$2.95) alternates comments: "Boys have trucks." "Girls have dolls." "Boys are doctors." "Girls are nurses."

"Boys fix things." "Girls need things fixed." "Boys can eat." "Girls can cook." "Boys invent things." "Girls use what boys invent."

One of the most oft-repeated patterns in books for older readers is the tomboy who, at the end of the story, adjusts to her traditional role, conceding that her mother was right and dresses can be pretty, or that it is possible to enjoy a girls' club as much as playing shortstop with the guys.

Let me hasten to say I am not against dolls, dresses, or clubs for girls. I think there is a place for them in children's books, just as there is for mothers who

**Go and Hush the Baby.** By Betsy Byars. Illustrated by Emily A. McCully. Viking. 32 pp. \$3.50. The winner of this year's Newbery Award has written an engaging little book for young children, a story in which not much happens but where there is evidence of the same warmth and understanding that permeate her books for older readers. Will is about to take off for a session of baseball when his mother, busily painting, asks him to "Go and hush the baby. It won't take long." Will cheerfully obliges; the baby is enthralled. Time to go? No, the baby frets again. Patiently Will runs through his repertoire of songs, games, and stories, until the baby is given something even more entertaining: a bottle. Illustrations and text are childlike without being childish. Slight, but very nice. Ages 2-5.

**A Road Down in the Sea.** By Lorenz Graham. Illustrated by Gregorio Prestopino. Crowell. 46 pp. \$3.95. "The Egypt people hold the Hebrews tight/ And make them slaves/ And make them work the



—From "A Road Down in the Sea"

prefer to (or have to) stay home baking brownies and generally overworking. We need both, so that children can learn that girls will grow up to be women who have a choice. In the present hue and cry about sexism in books let's not lose our perspective. And let's remember that we've had heroines like Harriet, the spy who did not come in from the cold, and like Ellen Grae, the child's Baron Munchausen. Let's not protest the image of Snow White. (Oh, yes, it has been criticized.) I don't think the members of *Feminists on Children's Media*, the active leaders in the publishing field, want aggressive heroines in every single book—at least, I hope they don't. They do want an open door, an equal chance, and female characters who are intelligent and active. More power to them.

Nevertheless, I must share the comment of a friend, Dorothy Gwynn, who, after attending a heated Women's Lib meeting, announced that she had decided to form a Ladies' Auxiliary.

farm/ And work the road/ And work some kind of hard." Thus begins an African storyteller's version of the Exodus of Moses and his people, first published in the author's *How God Fix Jonah*, a collection of Biblical tales in Liberian dialect. The illustrations are handsome, with jewel tones and dark faces on the color pages, which alternate with pages in stark black-and-white. The style is direct and flavorful. Ages 5-9.

**Secrets in Stones.** By Rose Wyler and Gerald Ames. Photographs by Gerald Ames. Four Winds Press. 64 pp. \$4.75. Black-and-white photographs supplement the text in introducing to young nature students the subject of stones and the kind of rocks they come from. The book is written simply, going into just enough detail to make comprehensible the effects of erosion, pressure, folding, and volcanic eruption, and suggesting some home experiments that show composition or structure. There is also a brief but enticing discussion of fossils. A very good first science book, this can be used with younger children but is primarily for ages 7-8.

**The Shoeshine Boys.** By George Panetta. Illustrated by Joe Servello. Norton/Grosset & Dunlap. 100 pp. \$4.50. Tony had never seen his father cry until the day he lost his job. What would they do? "*Che disgrazia!*" his mother wailed, and it was indeed a catastrophe. That is why Tony decided he would become a shoeshine boy like the black boy he had seen in Central Park. Stocked with polish and rags, Tony went into business. Success would have been nil except for the help and counsel of the other boy; he generously offered to go into partnership, and so the Black and White Shoeshine Company was formed. There's a wealth of warmth, humor, family affection, and interracial friendship in a nicely told story with urban background. Ages 8-10.