

IN SHORT

The Catherine Wheel. By Jean Stafford. Harcourt, Brace & Co. 281 pages. \$3.00. Unlike most fiction writers who have achieved first-novel success, Miss Stafford has shown steady and surprising progress since *Boston Adventure*. Her latest work is remarkable among the current crop of novels if only for its painstaking dedication, sincerity, and intensity. Her former literary affectations, Proustian and Jamesian gleanings, have been stripped away, leaving a style, which, though still somewhat involuted and a trifle remote from present-day American language, is a powerful and suitable instrument for this morbidly atmospheric study of disintegration and tragedy among the remnants of our New England aristocracy.

The story of Katharine Congreve, a much-courted but unmarried lady of thirty-eight, who lives in a manorial style of somewhat dubious realism, is intertwined with that of her twelve-year-old cousin in a manner that releases impassioned and troubling insights into obscure areas of feeling. Both are lonely, frustrated, and frightened of each other. Katharine feels sure the boy is aware that a kind of love affair is going on between her and his father; the boy thinks Katharine knows of his murderous feelings toward the brother of his best friend. Misunderstanding each other to the end, they are

brought into a sympathetic communion through an awesome, frightening and mystic catastrophe, the symbolism of which, though somewhat overprepared, has genuine force and compels belief. Long on psychology and the penetration of the interior recesses of character, somewhat short on standard fictional attributes (extended dramatic scenes, dialogue, social observation) *The Catherine Wheel* is written with such skilled seriousness and charged with such quivering emotion as to make it rank easily among the best novels of the last five years. *New Directions 13.* *New Directions Press.* 542 pages. \$5.00. The current *New Directions* annual carries on its custom, presenting a none too tasteful but nevertheless rich compilation of "experimental" writing, which means by now some watered-down specimens of what was once called "modernist" literature, some meritorious adventures in unusual genres and some splatterings in verbal mud. In between childish efforts to be clever and maundering stories about maundering writers are to be found some notable works. Niccola Tucci is represented by a characteristic, wittily sombre story of a death in Tuscany; Chandler Brossard by a sharply written study in New York paranoia. Paul Goodman works a uniquely psychoanalytic perspective into narrative and poetic sketches. There are

elusive, tantalizing essays on the mysteries of language and life by Jean Paulhan, some delicate lyrics by Nicholas Moore and an intelligent, skillful verse-narrative of mental and geographic travels by Kenneth Rexroth. The snarling, lively and misanthropic "Homage to Zola" by Celine is worth nearly all the rest. New Directions writing is scarcely news any more, but it is still a refreshing and commendable if erratic enterprise. *A Treasury of Western Folklore. Edited by B. A. Botkin. Crown Publishers. 806 pages. \$4.00.* An anthology that anybody with a somewhat romantic view of the West, who can take a few grains of realism with his fantasies, will

be able to nibble at with delight for years. The short pieces of every variety, written by all sorts from our best literary men to the plain-spoken wife of a Texas sheriff, deal with every aspect of the most legendary and colorful region of America. Read as a whole, it amplifies, corrects and enriches one's perspective on the most tumultuous chapter in our history. Taken piecemeal, it is as good, odd-moment reading as you can find. It is compiled with scholarship and flair. The preface, by Bernard de Voto, is a sour, baffling attempt to straighten out mistaken attitudes, which you are advised to by-pass if you don't want the trip spoiled.

An Advance in Aim ?

"Then," said Werner . . . "there must be a party to take over. An organized party; not a bunch of people thrown together at random."

"Your Party, you mean. The Communists." — "What other?"

"Any other," said Werner. "So long as it's not another totalitarian. But do tell me, supposing you won and had the power, what would happen to those who are against you? Or those who are not for you?"

Werner was silent for a moment. "There are many different ways," he said then.

"I know some. Killing, torturing, concentration camps."

"Among others. Depending on what's necessary."

"What an advance over the Nazis! Worth while living for!"

"It is an advance," declared Werner, unperturbed. "It's an advance in aim. And also in method. We don't do anything for the sake of cruelty. Only out of necessity."

"I've heard that often enough. That's what Weber explained to me when he stuck lighted matches under my fingernails. It was necessary in order to extract information."

Spark of Life by ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

Calder Willingham

TELEVISION Giant

in the living room

SINCE THE APPEARANCE of television a short time ago, many of the most dire predictions about the new medium have come true. Still others, apparently, will be realized in the near future. On the basis of the values of radio, Broadway and Hollywood, TV has already scored a success unequalled in human affairs, except possibly by the discovery of America or the invention of gunpowder. Of TV's dazzling triumph there is no doubt, but the medium is still generally thought of as something that is on its way. The

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fact is that it's here. Consider the following statistics:

(1) The advertising revenue for radio during the month of September, 1951, was \$11,861,000, and for television, \$11,920,000, as reported in *Variety*.

(2) Television in 1951 put on more plays, hired more actors, and spent more money on drama than all the producers and backers of Broadway, according to a report in *Time*.

(3) Despite the current boom at the motion picture box office, two more independent Hollywood studios (Monogram Pictures and Republic Pictures) announced in November they would make movies for TV.

The obvious conclusion to be