

L. Jacobson has pointed out, the horses galloped and the heroes fired not for land but for abstract concepts of Justice and Honour such as the ritual duel to the death as the answer to the refused offer of a drink. "More pioneers died of dysentery than of Indian arrows or one another's bullets," he wrote. "A screen cowboy could only die by homicide, which is much more romantic, both for the audience and for himself." Nevertheless, land hunger did find its place in the Western 20 years after *The Great Train Robbery* when James Cruze made *The Covered Wagon*, and more has been heard of it in recent years in such films as *Wagonmaster*, directed by the veteran John Ford, whose *Stagecoach* was an outstanding Western—and, incidentally, one of a number in which John Wayne appeared for the old master.

It's sometimes said that the Western has grown up now, but that in growing up it has stepped outside the accepted, conventional almost formalised violence of the past and become tougher and more sadistic. No doubt this is true—it's no longer safe to assume that a Western is suitable for children. But in growing up the Western has also brought new satisfactions to filmgoers, above the level of mere entertainment—the sort of satisfactions that help to make a film like Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*, a wonderful piece of film-making, one of the best Westerns ever—whether you agree with all the moral choices made in it or not. At the same time it crowned a 25-year career for its star, Gary Cooper, whose first big movie had been a Western, *The Winning of Barbara Worth*.

Jesse Lasky, the man who decided that *The Covered Wagon* was to be an epic, has described how he came to this decision while reading the book as he travelled by train across Kansas. "Every time I glanced out of the train window at the rolling prairies, the mountains, the desert, I saw the vast panorama of sky and earth forming a backdrop for those heroic souls whose first wagon train actually took much of the same course three

quarters of a century before." It was this authentic background that helped to give many Westerns their sweep and appeal.

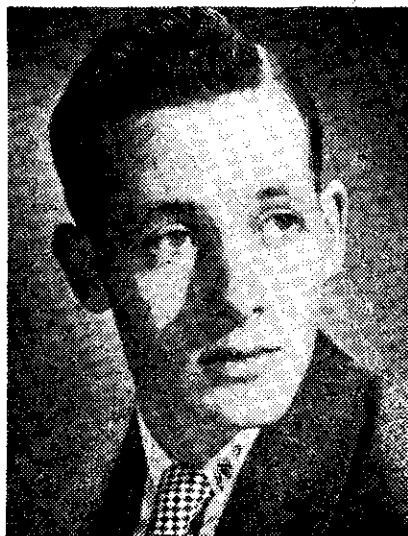
Nowadays, unhappily, a partial reaction has set in. Filmed for the most part indoors, TV Westerns are known in the trade as "four-wall Westerns—as big as all indoors." Yet *Time*, in its recent salute to "the American morality play," claimed that with all their faults TV Westerns have given television at last a taproot in the American tradition, while television has given the Western a chance to change with the times. One change is towards a more real man-woman relationship; another shows the beginning of an understanding between Good and Evil "where a sudden sympathy flashes between hero and villain." And the magazine ends by saying, a little grandly, of the Western: "In its finest expressions, it is an allegory of freedom, a memory and a vision of the deepest meaning of America."

Claims of this sort on behalf of the Western are not new. The French went overboard for it 40 years ago, finding significance in everything W. S. Hart wore or did. They saw his horse, his dog, his dice, his cards and his stone jug of whisky as dream symbols, and his guns, his belt and his studded leather cuffs as the trappings of a god. And there are those who see the Western as an instrument by which America keeps the combative spirit alive in its youth; who comparing America with the cowboy—violent only in action but never the aggressor, and moved to take up his guns only by injustice—warn darkly that if the truce is treacherously broken "there won't be enough tables to dive under once he draws."

Of course the serious student of the film, the psychologist, the thoughtful parent and the "professional worrier" are bound to consider such aspects of the Western—or of any other film. It's right that they should. But your ordinary filmgoer is likely to go on regarding it as he has always done—as a good night out with no hangover.

Melbourne Cup Broadcasts

THE first Tuesday of November draws near. On both sides of the Tasman conversation and financial speculation will once again be directed at an event



BILL COLLINS

of rare importance: the Melbourne Cup. The night before the big race, ZB stations together with 1XH, 12C, 22C, 22A, 4ZA and 2XB will be broadcasting a preview at 9.45 p.m.; and then, on Tuesday, November 3 at 5.0 p.m. (approximately), these same stations, together with the X stations and 3YZ, will be broadcasting a commentary by Bill Collins. At 6.49 p.m. another commentary, by ABC commentator Joe Brown, will be heard from the YAs and YZs.

Bill Collins comes from a well-known racing family and as a child his favourite game was to perch on a roof and "call" suitably-marked matches as they floated down a water-filled gutter. When a little older he became a stop-gap commentator, and this led to regular race broadcasting commitments and also a radio announcer's job. Joe Brown's great interest in racing has grown, he says, from a "... love for the thoroughbred, the finest animal that man has ever known." When he first became a commentator, in Hobart in 1945, his ambition was to call the Melbourne Cup. This year that ambition will be realised for the twelfth time.

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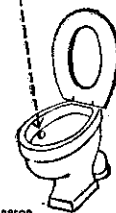
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