shouts, "Look, it's Gary Cooper!" For West, the scene is apocalyptic, and the violence non-cathartic. Tod, contemplating the scene, is first moved to think of his painting, *The Burning of Los Angeles*, at which he's been toiling to confer aesthetic order upon his confused experience of the city. But he too is swept up in the crowd, and ends the novel in a police car – not removed from or above the fray, but still somehow in it, laughing and loudly imitating the hysterical siren.

Unlike Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose "culture industry" thesis West's final novel anticipates by five years, West finds less hope in modernist art's capacity to resist reification. His brand of cynicism has proven immensely influential nonetheless, and West's soaring critical reputation today attests to the power of what he once called his curious kind of joking, which continues to fascinate, unsettle, and provoke. On December 22, 1940, one day after the death of his friend F. Scott Fitzgerald, West and his wife Eileen were killed in a car accident while returning from a hunting trip in Mexico.

SEE ALSO: The Avant Garde Novel (AF); Modern Fiction in Hollywood (AF); Modernist Fiction (AF); Politics and the Novel (BIF); Utopian and Dystopian Fiction (AF)

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West, Paul

DAVID W. MADDEN

Paul West is one of the most prolific and important voices to emerge in post-World War II fiction. His career spans a variety of fictional experiments, but beginning in the early 1980s he has consistently produced challenging postmodern historiographic novels. In addition to 23 novels and a volume of short stories, he has nine memoirs, seven works of criticism, and three collections of poetry.

Paul Noden West was born in Derbyshire, England on February 23, 1930; he attended Oxford University, and taught for over 30 years at Pennsylvania State University. His first major success came with a trilogy about his native village – *Alley Jaggers* (1966), *I'm Expecting to Live Quite Soon* (1970), and *Bela Lugosi's White Christmas* (1972) – that initially established him as one of England's "angry young men." In 1971, after becoming an American citizen, West began writing highly experimental novels such as *Caliban's Filibuster*, in which the reader is trapped in the mind of a frustrated screenwriter traveling across the Pacific Ocean.

With the publication of *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* in 1980, West began fictionally reinventing history to reveal the overlooked corners of human experience that often run contrary to the established historical record. In this novel, he enters the mind of Hitler's unsuccessful assassin to examine fissures in the granite edifice of Nazism, notions of individual responsibility and heroism, and a postwar conscience that never informs political adventuring. *Rat Man of Paris* (1986) is one of his most compassionate books and extends some of the issues of *Stauffenberg*. *Lord Byron's Doctor* (1989) concentrates on John Polidori, Byron's personal

doctor, who, in West's hands, develops a destructive personal competition with the poet. *The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper* (1991), *The Tent of Orange Mist* (1995b), and *OK: The Corral, the Earps and Doc Holliday* (2000), while each separate and unique, focus on either well-known public figures or events and in the process redefine the historical record.

Sporting With Amaryllis (1997), based on some of John Milton's Latin lyrics and his brief suspension from Oxford, not only challenges the poet's position as a serious Puritan writer but also emphasizes West's longstanding concentration on and dedication to the creative consciousness. Consistently, West's protagonists are artists or creators of one kind or another, and their adventures, whether private or public, center on the yearning for aesthetic beauty and independence. Identical concerns can be found in *The Dry Danube: A Hitler Forgery* (2000), in which a frustrated Hitler recounts his student days and exasperation over his abortive painting career. *Cheops: A Cupboard for the Sun* (2002) presents a hilarious encounter between the pharaoh and one of his staunchest critics, the Greek historian Herodotus. Both figures are artists, creating their own monuments to immortality, yet thoroughly in conflict with one another.

West has periodically explored his own life and most intimate relationships, transforming the notion of history into the most personal of realms. In *Love's Mansion* (1992), he imagines the courtship of his parents, children of different social classes in their village, who somehow fall in love and marry in spite of overwhelming obstacles. Similarly in *Life With Swan* (1999), West offers a moving paean to his spouse, the poet Diane Ackerman, and their enduring love affair. He returns to develop portraits of both parents in a pair of loving memoirs – *My Mother's Music* (1996) and *My Father's War: A Memoir* (2005) – that reinforce West's passion for personal history and offer new opportunities to explore the mysteries of human personalities.

He has also written accounts of his determination to learn to swim in midlife (*Out of My Depths: A Swimmer in the Universe*, 1983), his recovery from a stroke (*A Stroke of Genius: Illness and Self-Discovery*, 1995a), and a reminiscence of his teaching a group of gifted students (*Master Class: Scenes From a Fiction Workshop*, 2001). In these and other memoirs he brings all the inventiveness of the novelist, and in interviews he has confessed that traditional distinctions between the two genres are for him artificial.

In addition to various honors, West received a Lannan Literary Award (1993) for *Love's Mansion*, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Prize for Fiction (1985), and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the French government (1996). Despite a second stroke in 2004, West continues to write and publish.

SEE ALSO: The Avant Garde Novel (AF); Historiographic Metafiction (AF); Minimalist/Maximalist Fiction (AF); The Novel and War (AF); Postmodernist Fiction (AF)

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Wharton, Edith

DONNA M. CAMPBELL

Edith Wharton was a twentieth-century novelist and short story writer whose work ranges far beyond the genre of the novel of manners with which she is often associated. She is best known for her fiction of "Old New York," which chronicles the clash between traditional upper-class New York society and the brash, moneyed social climbers who invade and destroy it. Writing frequently about divorce and its complications at a time when divorce was socially taboo, Wharton delves beneath the mannerly facades of her well-to-do characters to explore the missed chances, thwarted love affairs, and instances of human cruelty imposed by a restrictive social system and the suffocating levels of hypocrisy needed to keep it in place.

Born Edith Newbold Jones on January 24, 1862 to an upper-class New York family, Wharton was educated by private tutors and studied philosophy, science, and several languages, lessons reinforced by her family's frequent trips to France, Italy, and Germany. After her marriage in 1885 to Edward "Teddy" Wharton, she lived the life of a well-to-do society matron, living in New York, spending summers in fashionable Newport, and traveling to Europe every year, yet she continued to write. She had already co-authored a book on interior design, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), and published three collections of stories, a novella, and a historical novel by 1905, the year in which she wrote *The House of Mirth*. From this period until her death she published one or more books every year, alternating novels with short stories, novellas, essays, and books of travel such as *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904) and *A Motor Flight Through France* (1908). After moving to Paris in 1911 and divorcing her husband in 1913, Wharton rarely returned to the United States. At the onset of World War I, she turned her considerable energies to organizing relief charities for refugees and the poor while still finding time to travel to the front lines. With *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a novel of old New York, Wharton became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, an honor matched by that of being the first woman to receive an honorary degree from Yale University, in 1923. Wharton's other novels of the 1920s were less enthusiastically received, however, and she was criticized as an expatriate out of touch with the jazz age so deftly captured by F. Scott Fitzgerald and younger writers. Wharton died at her home in Hyeres, in the south of France, on August 11, 1937.

The first 15 years of Wharton's career, beginning with five poems that appeared in *The Atlantic* in 1880 and culminating in the publication of *The House of Mirth*, show the range of themes that would mark her later work. The three collections Wharton published before *The House of Mirth* – *The Greater Inclination* (1899), *Crucial Instances* (1901), and *The Descent of Man and Other Stories* (1904) – contain some of her best short fiction. Although several stories in these collections, such as "The Muse's Tragedy" and "The Rembrandt," examine Jamesian conflicts between life and art, and between reality and representation, others such as "Souls Belated" and "The Other Two" anticipate Wharton's later explorations of adultery, divorce, and the inescapable bonds of social convention. In "Souls Belated," Lydia Tillotson has eloped to Italy with her lover, Ralph Gannett, leaving behind her husband and the stuffy society he represents. Like Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*, Lydia wants to find an ideal place where the lovers can live free from conventional rules, yet as an encounter with a flashy divorcée reminds her, knowledge of her unconventional affair will cause her to be ostracized. She realizes belatedly that convention will always bind her, first to her husband and now to Ralph, in ways that she cannot escape.

"The Other Two," by contrast, presents a comic take on serial divorce in which a refusal to