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It is produced and distributed bi-monthly through <http://efanzines.com> by Bill Burns in an e-edition only.

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Tellers of stories with ink on paper, not that they matter any more, have been either swoopers or bashers. Swoopers write a story quickly, higgledy-piggledy, crinkum-crankum, any which way. Then they go over it again painstakingly, fixing everything that is just plain awful or doesn't work. Bashers go one sentence at a time, getting it exactly right before they go on to the next one. When they're done they're done.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

THIS ISSUE OF *eI* is in memory of Dave Van Ronk, his mind and his music.

In the world of science fiction, this issue of *eI* is also in memory of dear old friends Evan Hunter and Art Rapp.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Robert Bonfils, Bruce Brenner, Brittany A. Daley, Stephen J. Gertz, Elaine Kemp Harris, Lee Hoffman, Miriam Linna, Richard Lupoff, Thomas P. Ramirez, Robert Speray, Ted White, and Joe Zinnato.

ARTWORK: This issue of *eI* features recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

I always had trouble ending short stories in ways that would satisfy a general public. In real life ... people don't change, don't learn anything from their mistakes, and don't apologize. In a short story they have to do at least two out of three of those things, or you might as well throw it away in the lidless wire trash receptacle chained and padlocked to the fire hydrant in front of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 13

The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earlkemp@citlink.net or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

Friday May 20, 2005:

Let me take this opportunity to say some fannish things about your work on eFanzines. We have been buying and selling a LOT of Parliament, including original artwork from the book covers and magazine articles. Your eFanzine articles have really been helping bring the whole picture together for me, as the major players, the artists and writers, the types of materials, make ever more sense. And, of course, *Sin-a-Rama*.

Maybe I'll be able to provide an article for your fanzine? Perhaps when I'm done with my PhD dissertation, which is about sex devices, photographs of sex devices, fantasies about sex devices, over the last 100 or so years. With an especial focus on sex dolls and artificial vaginas. Do you know anything about that?

--Cynde Moya

Wednesday June 8, 2005:

Thanks, Earl. At some point when I have the time I'll answer all those charges of bondage and fetishism in Wonder Woman -- even the charges of Lesbianism. Meanwhile thanks for including me along with the Wonder Women in your dedication.

--Trina Robbins

#

Well, well, well, another issue comes and I've barely finished Victor Banis' amazing book (thanks for lettin' us know about it and I couldn't put it down from second one of reading it)

Growing up in the Bay Area in the 1980s (hey, I'm only 30), I was exposed to a lot of what has been called "gay culture" since birth. The Male Exotic Dancer was one of those things that were always associated with the gay community around here, especially since there were always a great many places where they regularly danced in and around The City. My mom would go to see male strippers once in a while, it was the '80s after all, and it was very normal in my house for her to admit that, even to her mom. In 2004, while attending the Sonoma Valley Film Festival, I saw a great documentary about male strippers called *American Dancer*. It's a piece of verity that made me think and presented many of the same issues that Dan Andrews brought up in his story. The business has changed over the years, but there are still the issues with having relationships, with drugs, with dancing to make it through school and having the years determine when you're done with the business.



Must get a copy of *Silent Siren*. Must, must, must.

Ah, The Stones. My generation has a strange view of them. Those between 21 and 30 see them almost as the cartoon character versions of Rock Stars. No one around my age or younger sees them as legitimate sex symbols, merely as men who have managed to retain fame well beyond the reasonable expiration date. Still, I have discovered some of their albums, other than the ones like *Steel Wheels* that really sucked in the 1980s, are great. I still refer to many albums that are downers as "Too much 'Wild Horses' nor nearly enough 'Brown Sugar.'" "She Comes in Colours" is a song that will always bring me up to a higher place. Then again, *Sticky Fingers* is a fun album.

I knew Bruce Gillespie was a genius. His take on *House of the Rising Sun* was dead-on. It's become one of the songs that define what good rock 'n roll is to me: impossible to disregard while at the same time nothing to get hung about. The organ solo is one of the best in the history of rock, right up there with Yes' Roundabout and anytime Ray Manzera put his fingers to a keyboard.

Wonder Woman wasn't my choice for comics when I was a kid, but there was a giant Wonder Woman statue at St. James Infirmary in Mountain View, CA, just a few blocks away from the Computer History Museum. When the place burned down (1998, I think), the only photo of the place I could find was one of the 30-foot-tall Wonder Woman in the fashion of an up-skirt shot. I can remember going and the seats there were right under Wonder Woman were always taken. I had been in Boston when it burnt and didn't find out until the day I tried to go there for lunch after one of my early days at the Museum.

Lynda Carter had a profound effect on those folks who were a little older than me. I loved the show, I watched it every week, but she never drew me in. She's the hero of my favorite actress to work with, Kate Kelton. She wants nothing more than to play Princess Diana in that Whedon flick. She could pull it off too, since she has the bod for it.

Another great issue, Earl.

--Chris Garcia

Thursday June 9, 2005:

What's *Firefly*? And where can I get a disc or whatever of it? I assume you've seen *Kinsey*. Great movie, with a tragic ending.

I was in love with Lena Horne when you were in love with the more talented Josephine Baker. Much later, I was so genuinely in love with a black girl named Larnell Crawford that near the end of our ten-year affair I asked her to

marry me. She wisely refused. She was almost paralyzed with dread when I took her to the movies in Hollywood or dinner on Sunset strip, and much preferred me to take her to clubs in South LA, where people like Redd Foxx and Scatman Crothers performed. Dearest Larnell, she still stars in my sexual reminiscences.

Gosh, you went to a lot of exotic places. Like Tangier. And your memories of them are more vivid than mine of Saudi Arabia.

Good article by Gary. He's a better writer than either of us put together.

--Jerry Murray

#

Jeez, man! Great story about nixing Mick from the Worldcon!!! Way to go!

Really dug the down under ballyhoo '72... I thought Nik Cohn was the coolest with Awopbopa... when it first came out. That and Charlie Gillette's SOUND OF THE CITY kinda gave a leg up to rock n' roll... not that it ever needed to have the blessing of any semblance of literati.. ain't that the truth? Better the pocket-liner crowd STAY AWAY. Your scribbler there has a point when he says the earliest efforts are pure heart & soul, that by the time the hinterland hepsters hit the big towns with managers and money men, the smoothing and creaming begins... so true with everything. When they tell you what to do, what'll sell, what you're doing wrong... and when you follow their instructions, brother, you pay with your diluted deluded old self down the pike when you look back and go, "aw, maaaaan!"

--Miriam Linna

Friday June 10, 2005:

WOW Earl!

Great job on the newest issue of *eI*. And thanks for putting in those LOC's. I just spent the last few hours reading the issue and enjoyed it very much. I never knew you were the "Tin" man editor in prison, and the pieces on Wonder Woman were just great.

--L. Truman Douglas

#

eI20 was as wonderful as ever. I sat down on my way out the door to run some major errands, meaning to take just a peek, and needless to say, sat until I had devoured every crumb. I particularly enjoyed your piece about your holiday on Terminal Island. Oddly, I too had childhood fantasies about Wonder Woman. I say oddly because I was never into drag and, unlike many gay men, never had any desire to be a woman (or certainly none that I consciously recognized); I was always quite content to be a man, albeit a gay one. There's probably some connection there to the fact that throughout my life, most of my close male friends have been straight, but I'll let someone else analyze that. Anyway, what I do remember is that when very young, at play, I would fantasize being Wonder Woman. I don't recall any other female incarnations, excepting the occasional generic wicked witch, but bear in mind that I was the strange little boy who watched *The Wizard of Oz* and rooted for Margaret Hamilton. I never cared for girls in pigtails and the little dog looked ratty. Anyway, I don't know what all that says about anything, and I had quite forgotten those tomboy fantasies until I read your piece. I hope this doesn't trigger any more peculiar memories. I did like those underwater ballets of Esther Williams, though, and I would certainly have taken a few laps with Ricardo Montalban.

--Victor J. Banis



Wednesday July 6, 2005:

Hey, it's time to do the *eI* thing again, to see if I can scrape some creativity off what few brain cells avail themselves, and to etch them in phosphor and electricity. Or, I'll have diarrhea of the fingertips, whatever comes first. Here's a loc on *eI20*.

I remember years ago, Mike Glycer complained that he didn't want *File 770* to become an obitizine, and I believe Charlie Brown started putting photographs on the cover of the glossy *Locus* because any news that was on the cover usually included a black banner. These days, with so many good and busy fans passing away, every zine becomes an obitizine, whether its editor likes it or not. We lose so many good friends, so we must remember them as we make new friends, and try to bring other people into the happy asylum that is fandom, gentle hint....

Broadcast bloopers are always lots of fun. Probably the best known in Canada was on the good ol' CBC back in the '60s, when announcer Leon Mangoff gave the hourly network identification, and announced that we were watching "The Canadian Broadcorping Castration. Whoof!", which was Mangoff's reaction to what he'd just said, and the mike being cut off in mid-reaction.

Last week was historic in Canada, for gay men and women. The Canadian parliament made gay marriage legal, to reinforce gay marriage which is legal in eight of 10 Canadian provinces. I may be attending a few of these marriages in the near future; with this federal decision, some of our gay friends will be making the big decision shortly. Some couples will not get married, but they campaigned for this because they felt that having marriage as an option was another move towards equality for both sexual orientations.

I'd read that Mick Jagger was a fan, and that there's any number of famous types who don't like the fact they read SF get out, for fear it would hurt their careers being labeled a Trekkie or space cadet by the ignorant press. Jagger was smart enough to get his education before the Stones exploded into cultural icons, so I'm not surprised he enjoys SF. If the Stones looked ugly back then, I can only imagine how they look now. Last time they were in Toronto, and they're here fairly often, someone mentioned that their combined years totaled more than 300, and IMHO, Keith Richards looks like he's been dead for three years; no one's told the body it can lie down now... As good as the Stones are, I've had the feeling they've been coasting. "Hey, no sweat, we're the Stones," and they prance on the stage, wail away, and the people scream.

--Lloyd Penney

"Artists," he said, "are people who say, 'I can't fix my country or my state or my city, or even my marriage. But by golly, I can make this square of canvas, or this eight-and-a-half-by-eleven piece of paper, or this lump of clay, or these twelve bars of music, exactly what they ought to be!'"

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*



Will Eisner -- *The Spirit* Is Strong

By Ted White

This short (originally 1,130 words) piece was written for The Collecting Channel (dot com), as a daily feature article in early 1999. It was supposed to be only 1,000 words.

I met Will Eisner in the summer of 1980, while I was editing *Heavy Metal*, and Will came up to my office for a meeting and an interview. Like everyone I knew in the comics industry, I'd grown up on and revered *The Spirit*, and I had a healthy appreciation of Eisner's talents and accomplishments. When I met the man I found him to be spry and lively despite his age, and a delight to listen to. (My interview with him appeared in *Heavy Metal* in 1981.)

In the late '80s I went to a local Florida convention, Tropicon, and to my surprise found Eisner also there. It seems that he'd been a Guest of Honor at a previous Tropicon, and enjoyed the convention so much that he'd come back. It was close to ten years since we'd previously met, but he remembered me and spoke to me from the stage when he was on a program item. Still sharp as a pin.

There is less discussion of what Eisner *did* with *The Spirit* in the piece which follows, and there is no mention of the strip's appearances (as reprints) in Quality comics of the '40s, but, hey – I still ran over by 130 words.

#

One of the niftiest features of Sunday comics in the 1940s was Will Eisner's *The Spirit*. It wasn't just that, as older readers realized, the storytelling and art were so darned good. It was the *form* of the Sunday comic. It came as a miniature *comic book*. Some newspapers published it already bound – glued – as a separate comic book. Others published the pages as part of their regular Sunday comics, giving kids the opportunity to cut and fold and assemble their own comic books. (And a few papers published the pages blown up to Sunday tabloid comics size.) This difference in formats made *The Spirit* stand out uniquely, and makes it uniquely collectible – since each newspaper, which carried it, published it slightly differently, and all put their own logo on the "cover." Had Will Eisner done nothing else, this alone would ensure his place in comics history. But Eisner has done *much* more – and his legacy has been an enduring one.

Will Eisner is one of comics' foremost influences, and for good reason – the man has been producing pioneering comics work since the very beginnings of the industry.

In the 1930s Eisner produced the strip "Hawks from the Sea" for the short-lived comic book *Wow*, where he made the acquaintance of *Wow's* editor, Jerry Iger. The comics field was then still in its infancy, and with Jerry and \$35, he formed the very first comics production shop in New York City. This was a shrewd move and it gave many blossoming Golden Age comics luminaries their first breaks in the comics trade. (One was Jack Kirby. Artist Kirby collaborated with writer-designer Eisner to produce a comic strip version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* for the burgeoning foreign newspaper market.)

Deciding that the pulp magazine market was rapidly losing its momentum, Eisner and Iger saw a prime opportunity to expand their business by becoming active in packaging comic books for the independent publishers. By 1938 their shop employed around fifteen pencillers, inkers, and letterers who were turning out such noteworthy titles as *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. In 1939 the Register and Tribune Syndicate consulted with Eisner



noteworthy titles as *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. In 1939 the Register and Tribune Syndicate consulted with Eisner

about the idea of developing a new concept: the “newspaper comic book,” a 16-page comics insert to be distributed by the major American newspapers.

While the idea died after only one issue, the experience helped to push Eisner toward his eventual goal and in 1940 he sold his share of the shop to Iger to begin work on a landmark in comics history, *The Spirit*. This developed into an incredibly atmospheric film noir-like comic strip featuring Denny Colt, the presumed-dead masked hero. Behind the mask he was simply a man who was pushed to the limits and beyond. Eisner created *The Spirit* for the new Sunday comics sections, which were running in many of the nation’s papers, and toward that end, he established his own shop of young comics professionals. This dynamic atmosphere helped to fuel the beginning careers of such important writers and artists as Wally Wood, Jules Feiffer, Lou Fine, Jerry Grandinetti, Alex Kotsky, and Bob Powell.

Never satisfied to stay in one place, Eisner began to expand the parameters of this new art form and his bold experiments with storytelling and content, lighting and composition, would be a significant influence on those who followed, including Harvey Kurtzman and Archie Goodwin.

The Spirit continued until 1951, when Eisner chose to devote his attention to the production of special comics – Army manuals and instructional aids for business and schools. During the ensuing 20 years he spent his time productively on a variety of projects. Eisner was always a canny businessman and he prospered at everything he put his hand to. But *The Spirit* was merely biding its time, awaiting its rediscovery by a new generation of comics aficionados, and in 1972 Denny Colt and Friends resurfaced in Warren Publishing’s bimonthly *The Spirit* magazine. The reprinted stories had lost none of their impact over the years, and although the storyline was set in the 1940s, Eisner’s powerful and dynamic style was still so strong that, unsurprisingly, *The Spirit* wasn’t hopelessly dated, as so many of the other efforts from that period might appear to be.

Once again, Eisner served as an inspiring influence for a whole new crop of comics professionals who then began to push the envelope themselves when they realized the incredible potential of the comics field. But Eisner was not content to rest on his laurels; he moved into the field of graphic novels – and his were genuine graphic novels with the kind of stories and writing we expect of real novels. His graphic novels include *A Contract with God*, *Buildings*, *Life on Another Planet*, and a work rooted in the very beginnings of the comics trade, called *The Dreamer*. His definitive study of comics storytelling techniques, *Comics and Sequential Art*, is to be found on the shelf in virtually every comics professional’s studio, and Kitchen Sink Press was reprinting *The Spirit* as a complete run.

Unfortunately, Kitchen Sink Press closed its doors on Friday 18 December 1998. This publisher, which had been publishing Will Eisner’s work for the past 20 years (along with that of many other talented creators) will be sorely missed by both the industry and the fans. What this means for future reprints of *The Spirit* and Will Eisner’s new work is unknown at this time -- hopefully a new publisher can be found.

Will has posted the following to the Will Eisner discussion group dealing with the question of the current situation with *The Spirit* and other projects: “I have not yet decided where to go with my properties. My relationship with Kitchen Sink has, I confess, spoiled me in that I have become used to a very close and personal relationship with my publisher. This is not easy to find in the present publishing trade environment. While I wait for the dust to settle I am still at work on three books of varied subject matter. As for the *Spirit* series I do not know yet which direction it will go. Clay Moore is doing a *Spirit* statuette... I don't think it is ‘an action figure’ but it should be out in August of this year [1999]. There has not yet been any discussion with any publishers about any continuation of the series of *New Adventures* [*Spirit* stories written and drawn by today’s creators] that Kitchen Sink started. I am trying to sort out, ah, the deleterious debris -- between trying to produce three new books that are work in progress and assessing a strategy for continuing publication of the Will Eisner Library, I have my hands full.”



Eisner continues as a creative force, and we are all his beneficiaries.

#

Well, that's how the piece ended in 1999. Unfortunately, Will Eisner died on January 3rd, 2005 at the age of 87, following quadruple bypass heart surgery. Born in 1917, he lived a full and fruitful life.

In real life, as in Grand Opera, arias only make hopeless situations worse.

--Kilgore Trout, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake*

Living With Burroughs

By Stephen J. Gertz

For one year I lived with the grandmaster of Beat literature, William S. Burroughs. I remember it well. It was 2002. Burroughs died in 1997. Though I have paranormal experiences quite often (generally confined to sexual encounters) this was not one of them. Although....

If the soul of an author resides within their text, their spirit haunts the manifestation of the text, the physical object that is the book itself. Handling and, I dare say, fondling the book can evoke the jinn within; the book as an Aladdin's lamp, the essence of a writer summoned forth with a caress.

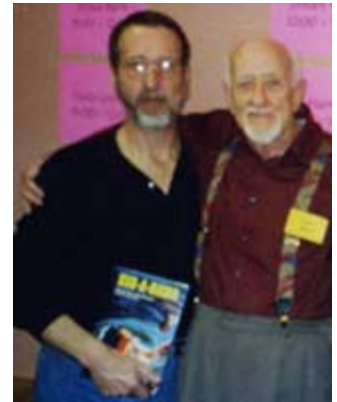
What we are dealing with here is a barrier of what can only be termed medieval superstition and fear, precisely the same barrier that held up the natural sciences for some hundreds of years with dogma rather than examination and research. In short, the same objective methods that have been applied to natural science should now be applied to sexual phenomena with a view to understand and control these manifestations. A doctor is not criticized for describing the manifestations and symptoms of an illness, even though the symptoms may be disgusting.

I feel that a writer has the right to the same freedom. In fact, I think that the time has come for the line between literature and science, a purely arbitrary line, to be erased.

--William S. Burroughs

I've had Marie Antoinette in my hands: I handled a set of beautifully bound volumes in full crimson morocco leather with elaborate gilt decoration and ornamentation with the armorial device of Antoinette; her copy, and I experienced an olfactory hallucination, her scent in my nostrils. I spent an afternoon with Mark Twain, examining and cataloging a copy of his *A Dog's Tale* with a particularly intimate and poignant inscription written in his hand; I felt he was at my side, whispering in my ear; we shared a cigar.

I've had many similar experiences but none more dramatic than the year I was surrounded by arguably the finest private collection of William Burroughs material in the world. Joe Zinnato, a friend and book dealer, had amassed the collection over a 30-year period but was now seeking capital to expand his holdings in another area of literary interest. We made a deal whereby Dailey Rare Books of Los Angeles, the rare book sanctuary I call home, would represent the collection's sale, an amalgamation of original manuscripts with corrections in Burroughs' hand; letters, scribbled scraps; the overwhelming majority of Burroughs' titles and editions found in Maynard & Miles' bibliography, many signed; over 150 magazines with Burroughs' contributions, all quite rare, many signed, with additional articles/stories of interest from other notable



Stephen Gertz and Earl Kemp. Courtesy Miriam Linna Collection. Mission Hills, CA, March 2005.



writers, including Charles Bukowski; Burroughs contributions to other books and anthologies; a great deal of ephemera including autograph post- and greeting cards, a boxful of private snapshots and more formal photographs

all but one never published; LP records, videos, reel-to-reel and cassette tapes featuring Burroughs; original cover art by frequent collaborator, Brion Gysin; artwork by the literary artist himself; and a sheaf of letters from Paul Bowles to a third party discussing Burroughs, Tangier, Maurice Girodias, and more.

I was surrounded by 18 boxes representing not just the man's work but his life. And Burroughs' presence was palpable; *El Hombre Invisible*, the nickname bestowed upon him due to his tall, gaunt, ashen, spectral appearance--he looked like a hip undertaker; his life, indeed, a hip if painful undertaking--was in attendance. Like a kid in a candy store, I was in nirvana, Burroughs at my side as I examined each piece.

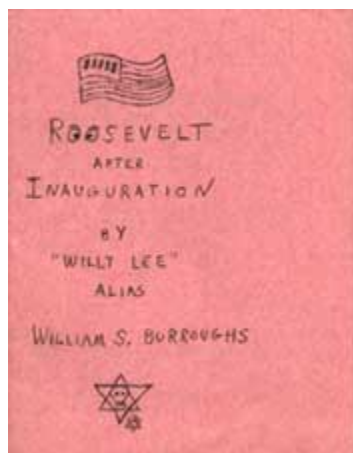
It isn't often that one has the opportunity to track a literary creation from conception, drafts, layouts, printing, publication and sales but here it was: the archive to Burroughs' *TIME*, one of his better "cut-ups."



Though Dadaist Tristan Tzara had experimented with the form, taking established text, deconstructing it by scissoring it into pieces and reassembling the scraps into a literary collage, it was Burroughs who fully explored and exploited the idea, one that began when artist and Burroughs' friend and frequent collaborator, Brion Gysin, accidentally cut through a newspaper he was using as under pad for an art piece he was cropping with a razor-knife. It was a natural extension to what

Burroughs had done with *Naked Lunch*, which was written in pieces, scraps and shards of text over time, then typed into manuscript. The manuscript was then deliberately shuffled like a deck of cards; the text requiring a few shuffles before Girodias finally accepted it for publication. The shuffles were never random; this was not a chaotic, chance editorial exercise but rather the willful reorganization of text toward a determined, ordered end.

And so here was the original issue of *Time Magazine* Burroughs used with all the spaces where text had been cut-out; a 26-page signed, typed manuscript with corrections in his hand; another draft, a 14-page typed manuscript with autograph corrections; an 11-page typed manuscript/collage with title page; a 12-page photo-negative of the prior item with extra drawings and highlighting by Joe Brainard; a 32-page small mock-up of the book in ink by Brainard; the cover as prepared by Burroughs with art by Gysin; the publisher's ledger/account book with production costs, orders to whom and how many; and over 100 pieces of mail concerning ordering and publication, including the copyright certificate, and the complete list of where copies of the 1-10 edition and 1-100 edition were sold, providing a remarkable insight into the marketing of the book.



I have not been able to read *Time Magazine* since without reflexively juxtaposing text:

"J-Lo and Ben split over Weapons of Mass Destruction found in Martha Stewart Living With Alzheimer's Disease in the Sudan where civil war fought with box-office bomb *Gigli* poisoned well-water taints the oases bottom line Kofi

Annan Lincoln's secret lover on Martha's 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets during K-Mart Blue-Light Special Forces operations in Afghanistan to flush Osama from movie theaters in Darfur where children are starving for entertainment the whole family can enjoy without retribution from death squads Martha claims 'innocent!'"



Here's an 8x10 black and white photograph of Burroughs in Paris standing on rue Git-le-Coeur outside of the most famous fleabag-flophouse in literary history, the nameless joint otherwise known as The Beat Hotel by its eccentric guests, whom John De St Jorre in his history of the Olympia Press, *Venus Bound*, characterized as "a colorful collection of painters and prostitutes, jazz musicians and petty criminals, poets and hustlers, writers and junkies." *Whoosh!* I'm carried away on a magic carpet to my spiritual home; I've a room down the hall from Burroughs, picking goateed hipster lice in berets out of my hair while Burroughs, in the communal latrine, curses in his deadpan-ironic nasal monotone that octopus tentacles are strangling his bowels, that he'd give Jesus a blowjob for a decent shit, his cuckoo ca-ca clock clamorin' for constipation's end.

Another: Burroughs and Gysin superimposed over a section of Notre Dame cathedral taking their place as the stoned saints of Beat amongst the saints in stone bas-relief that adorn its façade.

And another, perhaps the most succinctly defining image of Burroughs ever, he at a construction site standing in front of a large sign: "DANGER."

I open the box of snapshots--over 60 color photos, many taken by Burroughs' bibliographer and friend, Barry Miles--and I'm immersed in Burroughs private life in Tangier as no other who didn't know him personally or view these photographs could be: WSB in a red bathing suit sunning himself on the roof of his apartment building--a startling image as he is almost always seen in his uniform: dark suit, white shirt and tie; Burroughs comfortably sitting between two of his Moroccan boy-toys, youngsters in full Arab drag with crossed swords in their belts, and Burroughs's jinn whispers in my ear: "those junior janissaries of jism had Damascus steel in their shorts and lips made for mouthfuls of phallic mirth"; Burroughs sitting in front of his typewriter, caught in the act with Gysin standing at his side; and many, many others. I'm embarrassed yet thrilled by the intimacy; I'm a fly-on-the-wall spying into WSB's quotidian life.

I want to dive into the boxes of books but simple physics prevents me from jack-knifing into the library, so I take them out individually: a pristine copy of a first edition *Naked Lunch* in very fine dust jacket. Few realize that many of Girodias' Traveller's Companion paperbacks with their simple, uniformly designed printed green wrappers, were issued with djs. I pass my hand over the stylishly designed dj and, to my surprise and annoyance, Jack Kerouac shows up, dripping 100-proof ectoplasm. The guy needs to be seriously squeegeed. He's a bloated, bleary wreck.

"What brings you here, Jack-o?" Bill politely asks.

"Stakin' my claim, Bill, just stakin' my claim."

Apparently hung-over from a drinking session with Mom in the afterlife and desperate to shore-up his fading literary reputation, he starts riffing on his importance in the literary canon.

"*On the Road* is the archetype American novel, the quest for bountiful horizons, the car as modern-day horse galloping into flaming sunsets that never sink into the night, toward frontiers unfettered by geography, a road trip of the mind traveled on the double-laned mystic highway boundless and beautiful and fueled by Benzedrine; an American classic that captures--and continues to do so--the optimistic, fundamental American yearning for



adventure, redemption and home that is just over the next hill if we have the courage to drive fast and forward. Hell, it so captured the American imagination that an early '60s T.V. show was based on it, *Route 66* starring George Maharis and Martin Milner with a theme by Henry Mancini. Whad'ya think, Bill?"



"I'll let 'Unfortunately Straight Steve-arino' answer, ol' Jack." He gave me the nod.

"All you say is true," I began, "and *On the Road* certainly spawned a T.V. show but it was also responsible for every single piece-of-shit 'buddy' road movie ever made since to its eternal shame. What's more, methinks you a little too enamored by the sound of your own voice in print; you're the Thomas Wolfe of the Beat Generation, verbose 'til the reader wants to scream and I have bad news for you: like Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Your writing's a combination of speed and Ex-Lax, projectile diarrhea of the mind. You weren't really a member of the Beat Generation, you were the prior generation's last gasp, stuck in an idealized version of a bygone America, your Pre-WWII childhood tethering you unmercifully as you tried to break free of it and your mother.

"Billy-boy, in contrast, shucked all that. He rejected that America of down-home constipated consciousness, that childish yearning for a past that never was, that prolix, 19th century reminiscent novelistic style of yours out of time and out of gas for the Atomic Age. True, *Naked Lunch* is for many unreadable but so is James Joyce, for God's sake. As far as *Naked Lunch* never being adapted for television, that is all to it's credit. And while Cronenberg imaginatively adapted it for film, *Naked Lunch* has spawned not one idiotic movie after another as *On the Road* has. Billiam turned 20th century writing on its ear by sodomizing straight narrative up the Yazoo. *Naked Lunch* is not an American novel much less an American classic. It is, however, to its glory, a classic of world literature, transcending American parochialism to speak to the transnational, universal consciousness of the trickster renegade within us all that seeks to break the boundaries of the internal landscape. *On the Road* is petroleum-fueled metal on wheels, a hip bumper-car that ultimately crashes into the walls of East and West Coast; *Naked Lunch* is a nuclear age powered rocket puncturing the sky, shooting into space to another world.

"You say you influenced pop-culture. True, but that was close to 50 years ago. *Naked Lunch*, as all great art--and the book is a work of art--though it made an immediate impact amongst the cognoscenti, had a delayed influence upon popular culture. Decades after its publication it would inspire the Punk movement, David Bowie, Kathy Acker, Philip K. Dick, Apple's Steve Jobs, and many others; a who's who list of poets, artists, novelists, filmmakers, etc. In 1972, Donald Fagen and Walter Becker named their new group Steely Dan, thereby becoming the first group, musical or otherwise, to be named after a dildo. Not just any dildo but the most famous dildo in all of world literature, Burroughs' keister-pleaser in *Naked Lunch*, and I chuckle every time I hear Steely Dan on the radio, wondering if station management has any awareness that their disc jockeys are announcing a song by the great dildo band, Fagen's lyrics archetypal examples of Burroughs' Dada-Dante-esque world.

"No one can read your *Visions of Cody* in its complete, posthumously issued edition without experiencing, to one degree or another, drooping eyelids. One may get nightmares, one may even experience nausea but no one, no way no how, can ever fall asleep reading *Naked Lunch*.

"But most of all, Jack, you commit the unpardonable sin of absolute humorlessness or at best humor without a trace of tangy, social bite. WSB's work, in contrast, overflows with tartly ironic, acid wit; this guy could do stand-up--certainly not in a typical Vegas lounge but in a nice, seedy roadhouse joint in purgatory, The Infernal Komedy Klub where over-the-top Dadaesque ironic burlesque routines are appreciated.



"I rest Bill's case."

"A little rough on ol' Jack, weren't you, Steve-o?" Burroughs dryly commented.

"He's dead, he can take it," I coolly replied. "The nerve of this uninvited juice-head, horning in on my literary séance!" I turned to Kerouac. "Hit the road, Jack."

I swear I caught Kerouac posing in his mother's Maidenform bra swilling Jack Daniels before dematerializing in a puffy huff back to wherever he's now calling home.

Now another: one of only 90 copies of the giant, enclosed in custom wood portfolio edition of *Seven Deadly Sins* with 7 woodblock silkscreen prints 45X31 inches on white 2-ply museum board each signed and numbered, a few of which Joe had archivally mounted and framed. I've got them standing upright on the floor and the effect is as if Burroughs had a mini-cam implanted backward in his forehead and I'm watching streaming, screaming video of Bill's brain at work. I've got so much of this stuff around me, have become so well acquainted with Burroughs that we're now on a first name basis.



Christ! Here's a beautiful copy of the British "Digit" paperback edition of *Junkie*, a book that comes on the market about once every ten years and now fetches upward of \$5K depending upon condition, an almost mythic edition that few have actually seen, the first edition "double Ace book" paperback almost common by comparison. Joe has wisely enclosed both editions in plastic sleeves; my salivary glands are in overdrive.

I open the boxes of magazines with WSB contributions, the overwhelming majority signed. I've never told Joe but I took all of them out of their meticulously organized order within the boxes and rolled in them: one of 50 copies of the offprint to Burroughs' *Letter From A Master Drug Addict to Dangerous Drugs*; a copy of *Big Table*; *Floating Bear*; *City Lights Journal*; *Cleft 1, 2:4-7*; *Bulletin From Nothing*; *Insect Trust Gazette*; *Fruit Cup*; *Gay Sunshine*; and hundreds more, including the rare *Marijuana Newsletter 1:1,3*.

OH, MY GOD! A 33-page original typed manuscript of his annotations to the catalogue of the Burroughs archive in Lawrence, Kansas--his hometown--containing inked corrections in his hand.

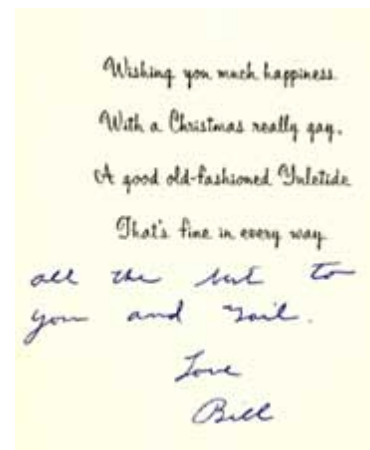
A Xerox typed manuscript of *Port of Saints* presented to Richard Aaron by Burroughs; unique because Burroughs never kept the original manuscript. Aaron provided a sworn, signed statement of provenance and circumstance to Joe. I'm looking the manuscript over and I realize that this is so radically

different than the published edition that it constitutes an original unpublished manuscript. I'm one of maybe ten people in the world to have seen and read it.

There's a cryptic autograph scrawl of Burroughs' on Pennsylvania Railroad letterhead that reads: "At Prie Ricard [sic?] rooming with Indian boy--deformed genitals on the other (Gerard)--I was, perhaps, coming down with jaundice--any one can see suffering. Does he think I dislike him? Some one has come for the laundry. I can hardly drag myself around. Then I might put out the dog and the [?] that vowed to bite our [?] where we lay."

A Letter to the Editor of *After Dark Magazine* on Burroughs' letterhead that sets the record straight, as it were: "Correction: William Burroughs is not going straight [heterosexual]. He knows it. Wouldn't You?"

I'm touched by a Christmas card with a short, warm inscription signed "Bill"; odd evidence that Burroughs, for all his radical, kaleidoscopic prose and messenger from the underbelly persona, is at heart a nice, thoughtfully tender guy from the Midwest. An autograph postcard to a publisher passes through my hands.



Dig this: *Veteran Sirens*, a 17-1/2x23" painting by Bill. It's advanced primitive fingerpainting, and most would say, "I coulda done that," but they didn't. Burroughs did. Lookit! R. Crumb's *Meet The Beats* poster #2, one of five copies lettered A-E and signed by WSB. Listen! Original master 7" and 5" reel-to-reel tapes of Burroughs' audio collages, etc., including the master for the *Call Me Burroughs* LP; Bill's master audio cut-up of Dutch Schultz & Young Queer; Bill reciting Willie The Rat; the master of Bill reciting The Last Words of Hassan Sabha; much more to listen to--my ears are ringing!--not the least of which is a tape of Burroughs singing (!!!!!!!) medleys of Marrakech music; he makes Yoko Ono sound like Barbra Streisand in comparison, and must be heard to be believed but believe it, I heard him.

I reach back into a box and take out *The Cat Inside*, one of 18 copies signed by Bill and Brion Gysin out of a total edition of 133 copies, and printed on fine Crisbrook paper, the entire book produced and published by the legendary Grenfell Press in 1986, the last collaboration between Burroughs and Gysin and certainly Burroughs' most sentimentally affecting work, written at a time when his personal and artistic maelstrom had somewhat settled and he could delight in the simple comfort of feline companionship and relate to the feline soul. Yet Burroughs was always--and remains, even after his death--the hippest cat on the scene. Bill's jinn leans over to me and whispers these words from the text, which can stand as a Beat Manifesto: "We are the cats inside. We are the cats who cannot walk alone, and for us there is only one place."

For Burroughs, that place, wherever it might have been in his head when he penned those lines, is in the literary firmament, his outlaw star burning through our polluted atmosphere to illuminate the post-modern human condition which may not be pretty but in the right light--Bill's light--can be seen in all its painfully dissonant beauty.

Epilogue

The dot.com bust pushed the big money into hiding, and institutions cried poverty. I couldn't sell the collection even at a dramatic discount to \$225K. I packed it all back into the boxes, those corrugated cardboards filled with Aladdin's lamps. Joe has been selling the collection piecemeal over the last couple of years, and I often wonder if some lucky someone has taken any one of the items into their hands and lovingly rubbed it, thus releasing Bill's jinn for another one-on-one with *El Hombre Invisible*.

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Special thanks to Joe Zinnato for help with this article; all Burroughs-related photography courtesy Joe Zinnato Collection.

On reading: "With my brains all fired up, I do the nearly impossible thing that you are doing now, dear reader. I make sense of idiosyncratic arrangements, in horizontal lines, of nothing but twenty-six phonetic symbols, ten Arabic numerals, and perhaps eight punctuation marks, on a sheet of bleached and flattened wood pulp!"

--Kurt Vonnegut, intro to the collection *Bagombo Snuff Box*

Confessions of a Book-Cadger

By Richard Lupoff

Over the years, I've been a reviewer a lot of times. Originally in print—in various fanzines of the 1950s and '60s, later in professional magazines like *Ramparts* and *Algol*. I've reviewed books, fanzines, movies, and music. Somehow missed out on the restaurant and single-malt Scotch scenes, but I'd like to give one or both of those a whirl.

It's surprisingly easy to get on reviewer lists. Hey, maybe I'm giving away a trade secret here. Don't all jump on the bandwagon, kids. But if you write a letter on some kind of official-looking letterhead and ask to be added to the list of reviewers, most book publishers and record companies will accede. If in doubt, have your secretary, girl friend, boy friend, or unindicted co-conspirator call 'em up for you. "This is Dennis Dinkelstein, administrative assistant to Ms. Estelle Hofmeyer here at KZQM in Tacoma. Ms. Hofmeyer is instituting a new book-review program. She is particularly interested in volumes devoted to gardening and snake breeding. Would you be so kind as to send her your recent titles *Raising the Carnivorous Calla-Lily for Fun and Profit*, and *The Sex-Life of the Egyptian Hooded Cobra*. Also, would you please send Ms. Hofmeyer all future volumes of similar nature."

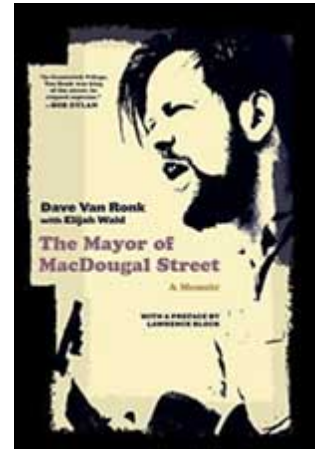
Not every time, but more often than not this works like magic. Sometimes they send catalogs of their forthcoming titles and reviewers' checklists for you to send back. Sometimes they just send books. Same thing for records. Back in the LP era I got on a bunch of mailing lists. In a good week I would receive 150 albums of rock & roll, country-western, folk, classical, or show tunes. In a bad week I would receive more. Of course I got a lot of trash in the mail, but I got a lot of great stuff, too. In 1991 Pat and I decided to have our house renovated and had to raise a lot of cash to pay for the new plumbing, wiring, tiling, and so forth.

I sold my LP collection to a local record dealer, made a bunch of bucks that went into home repairs, and started over collecting CDs,

Long after I gave up reviewing music—too much work for too little pay—I would still receive those heavy corrugated cardboard packages in the mail. Once you get on the mailing list, it's almost impossible to get off, but eventually they do purge their mailing lists and I don't get music from 'em any more. Alas.

Although I've cut way down on book reviewing, too—too much work for too little pay—I still do a little of the stuff, mostly on radio. And I still get books. Usually the ones I ask for, but occasionally something totally wonderful and totally unexpected will pop into my mailbox.

A recent example is *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, by Dave Van Ronk with Elijah Wald. It's Van Ronk's autobiography, put together and polished by Wald after Van Ronk's death. It is a wonderful book, amazingly like a fannish memoir.

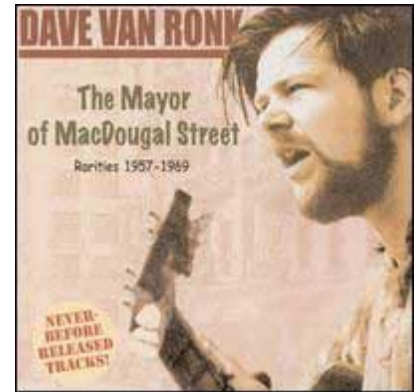


This is not surprising. As Van Ronk points out, the overlap of science fiction fandom, radical politics, and the folk music revival was extensive. The book is full of people we knew and loved: Dick Ellington, Jock Root, Tom Condit, Lee Hoffman, Larry Shaw, Harlan Ellison, Chuck Freudenthal, etc. There's even a lovely photo of Lee Hoffman with Van Ronk. It's undated but it looks like 1957 to me.

I don't think I ever met Van Ronk, which is really weird considering how many mutual acquaintances we had and how often we were in the same scene—but I guess never quite at the same moment. I'm really sorry I never met the guy. Or maybe I did in some busy scene and failed to take note. My loss. Lee Hoffman thinks I did meet Van Ronk, or at least that I probably did. There were a lot of fannish gatherings in the era Van Ronk writes about, and a lot of the folk clubs and coffee houses where he hung out and performed were also, at least occasionally, recognized as fannish dives. A lot of us spent a good deal of our time in a variety of chemically induced dazes in those days, too. So in all likelihood Lee is right. But if I met Van Ronk I failed to take note of the event.

What a pity. He seems like a fantastic person. And very, very much his own

man. He was an unrepentant Trotskyite. Good Grief! When I was involved in East Coast fandom in the 1960s, John Boardman was known as The Last Surviving Stalinist in New York. There were assorted socialists, anarchists, Wobblies, and God-knows-what-else, but I never realized we still had at least one Trotskyite among us. As for science fiction, near the end of the book Van Ronk says something like, "Science fiction is brain-rot, but it's good brain-rot."



The book starts, by the way, with a brief chapter on Van Ronk's childhood—his absent father, hardscrabble Irish mother, and Catholic school miseducation. But the whole rest of the book concerns the 1950s and '60s. Van Ronk lived until 2002, but there's nothing there after 1970. Wald suggests that Van Ronk felt the scene that interested him simply disappeared after 1970. He may have been right, but I wish he had continued. The guy had a great flair for words. Well, no surprise, he was a talented songwriter. And he had a great, fannish sensitivity and worldview. I wish he'd gone on and written about the 1970s, '80s, '90s, and the dawning of the glorious new millennium in which we presently dwell.

But I'm not going to dwell on what isn't in the book. I'm talking about what is in it. Scene after scene and person after person whom you know, or whom you will feel you know after you've read it. By gum, this is the best book I've read in months if not years. Pick up a copy and settle in for a treat.

The big trouble with dumb bastards is that they are too dumb to believe there is such a thing as being smart.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Sirens of Titan*

Walking Down Dave Van Ronk Street

By Charles Freudenthal

Introduction

After contributing some minor tidbits to Dave Van Ronk's autobiography, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, coauthored by Elijah Wald and published after Dave's death, I remembered some anecdotes which were not in the book and which might entertain his friends and fans.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who knew Van Ronk or is interested in the great "folk music boom" of the fifties. (From the horse's mouth!) Did you know that Peter, Paul and Mary were almost Peter, Dave and Mary? Read all about it!

There are many pages about Lee Hoffman and *Caravan*. (Blind Rafferty, a *Caravan* editorialist, was Dave Van Ronk.)

Van Ronk's Feud

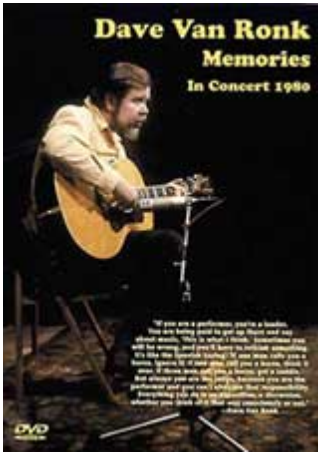
The feud between Van Ronk and Dick Ellington was entirely one sided. It didn't exist as far as Ellington was concerned. It came about in this manner.

The Dive was a sort of Slan Shack on the corner of 103rd St. and Riverside Drive in Manhattan (circa 1955/56). We had a couch in the living room on which crashers used to sleep. The rule was a guest could stay three months and then move on to make room for another needy person. (I am not really sure of the time interval.)



Before he started making money as a jazz/folk musician, Dave lived very poor. He stayed three months and then Dick asked him to leave. Somehow Dave thought the rules shouldn't apply to him and he got very huffy. The upshot was he never forgave Dick which was unfair because it was a house rule.

Dave as Capo



This is a story Dave told us one night at the Dive when we were all passing the jug. (Does anybody remember 1950s Vino Rosso?)

Dave was 6 foot 2 inches tall. This gave him a certain status amongst his peers. I wouldn't say the Queens adolescents he hung out with were "ganged up," but let us say some of them began to contemplate activities of a more than recreational nature. When Dave found things getting a bit heavy, he sidled out of that company and discovered the Village. He never looked back. His history in the Village is narrated at great length in his autobiography, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*.

Axel's Castle

Dave and Richie Fox (an abstract expressionist artist) rented a loft on Monroe Street, below what would become "the East Village". (The name Axel's Castle came from a story by Villiers de L'isle-Adam.) Later, I shared the rent to have a Manhattan pad. (I worked out on Long Island. No car.) Lofts at that time were much cheaper than apartments with the same area.

Lofts have a certain cache in New York. They represent the Bohemian life!

I have to my own satisfaction discredited the myth that this loft had once been occupied by Norman Mailer. He certainly had a loft of this type in mind when he wrote *Advertisements For Myself*.



Sandwiched between two issues of Lee Hoffman's music fanzine *Caravan* are Dave Van Ronk and Lee Hoffman, photographed in New York by Photo-Sound Associates in 1957. Photo courtesy Lee Hoffman Collection. *Caravan* cover scans courtesy Robert Lichtman Collection.

The great electricity caper

I wasn't living in Axel's Castle very long before I discovered our electricity was being ripped off from a neighbor. I had become used to a raffish life, but this was going rather far.

The previous downstairs neighbor had let Dave and Richie tap their power from an outlet in his bedroom. (This outlet and the invasive tap were hidden by a curtain.) Nobody had informed the new tenant of this cozy

arrangement. We began to worry about what would happen when the victim discovered he was paying for our juice too! What to do?

When the neighbor downstairs gave an open party, Richie inveigled his way in. (Dave was too huge and I was too chicken.) When no one was looking, Richie unplugged the cord and Dave rapidly reeled it up.

Dave Van Ronk

I will finish with a quote from Dave from p.63 of his autobiography:

"At that point (...i.e., the first appearance of Lee Hoffman's *Caravan* ...), there was a great deal of overlap between folk fans, the fringe left, and the science fiction crowd--all three offered new, interesting ways of looking at the world and a chance to mingle with like-minded souls who were equally frustrated with the monochrome oppressiveness of Eisenhower America."

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Special thanks to Lee Hoffman, Robert Lichtman, and Richard Lupoff for help with this article.

I couldn't survive my own pessimism if I didn't have some kind of sunny little dream.

-- Kurt Vonnegut

Into the Abyss A Memoir

By Thomas P. Ramirez

I should have known the minute I got home late on that snowy December afternoon that something was up. My wife Fern's expression – rapt and excited – was warning enough.

The year was 1960, and I was in the sixth year of my schoolmaster shtick, teaching grade 6 at Franklin School, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I was returning to the little cubbyhole we called home, a house Fern and I had built with our own four little paddies.

"What's up, kiddo?" I asked when she began jumping around, waving this letter at me.

"Wonderful news, honey," she chirped, "the most wonderful news in the world."

Well, hotcha, I thought, *this has gotta be something*.

The letter was from Scott Meredith, my literary agent at the time. I had been expecting a check for a sex yarn he'd placed with *Rogue* (the Hamling karma already unwittingly in place), so why all the commotion? Had some cluck clerk made a boo-boo and added some extra zeros?

And while Fern didn't normally open my mail – The expected check. What kind of a hoopen-socker Christmas might we have in store? It would've definitely been Bob Cratchit if it was left up to my teacher's salary.

The letter contained no check – *damn!* – only a thank you for edited chapters of a Monarch wannabe. But one-third of the way down the cream-colored page, the top blew off of everything.

“... After reading your last in which you expressed a desire to go full time,” Scott (AKA Joe Elder) wrote, “I placed a call to the Model editor out in Chicago (there was no Model, there was no Chicago, more code stuff in their keep-Ramirez-in-the-dark program), and we had a long discussion about your progress. I told him about your letter, and the upshot of all this is that he wants you to do a book a month for him. I told him that you were giving up a fairly lucrative job to go full time, and so I got him to up your rate to \$1,000 per book — \$800 on acceptance, \$200 on publication. In short, a guaranteed \$12,000 per year (not exactly correct — Scott took \$100 commission) or possibly more, and that ain’t hay.”

Well. Wrens could have nested in my mouth. *Twelve grand a year? Double my crummy teacher’s salary? Lord God Almighty!*

I put my arms around Fern and we just hugged for a long while. Then we sat down for supper with the kids, both of them bewildered by the sappy, excited smiles on our faces. “We’re gonna be rich, kids,” I told them. “Just wait and see.”

Later, after Vianne and Gregg were down for the night, we discussed the proposal hard and long. Did we really want to do this? I had some small equity in my teacher’s pension fund, did I want to lose that? Did I really, in my heart of hearts, want to turn my back on teaching? I’d been in the teaching harness for a long time; it would be one helluva drastic change. And what if I fizzled, what if I couldn’t turn out a book a month? Writer’s block? Even though that dread bugbear had never hit, there was always a first time. And what would we fall back on then?

And while I was relatively happy teaching and was well regarded by students and peers alike, I still had other fish to fry. Pounding my decrepit Remington weekends and evenings, I was writing/selling occasional short stories, even a couple of try-out sex books for Model, and the upcoming Monarch. But it wasn’t enough. I dreamed constantly of one day chucking it all and going full time.

During those ancient times teachers’ salaries were strictly starvation alley; it wasn’t until the mid-’70s that they began creeping up. In fact, had I finished the 1960-61 school year, my yearly income would have zoomed to the princely sum of \$5,800!

We took a few more days to think about it, and then I wrote Scott Meredith a letter telling him I’d do it. *If I could break my teaching contract.* He was delighted (more extortion money for him — though I didn’t know exactly how vigorously he put the blocks to Bill Hamling until many years later) and laid down the general ground rules.

And yes, I knew that what I was writing was basically porn, but at that time we described sex in such wimpy, indirect ways that it really didn’t seem illegal (let alone naughty) to me. If people wanted to read hot sheet books, more power to them. The blue noses could just stay out of that corner of the bookstore. I’d written two novels for Model (Nightstand) earlier for \$600 apiece, but these had taken months to do. Could I now begin grinding them out once a month? Where would I come up with that many ideas?

Next I built a sugar-sweet letter to the school board, asking for release at mid-term so I could take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity. Of course there was no mention of the nature of the scorchy masterpieces I’d be writing. Naive though I was, I knew enough to keep the details vague.

Then came the weeklong wait for official word. Bureaucracy shall be always with us, even in the lofty halls of ivy. Yes, came the mailed notice, they were willing to cancel my contract. But with great reluctance; I had been a good teacher and they hated to lose me. (That and a dime would get you a cuppa anywhere in town.)

Fern and I got a sitter and went out on a mild toot that night.

But when that final day of teaching came around, a most unexpected thing happened. I’d told the kids I was quitting to be a writer, and general consensus among my students was yes, they might miss me. On that mid-January day as I passed out report cards for the last time, I lost it. Calling each kid’s name to come up for his/her report card, I got so choked up that I couldn’t finish the job. “Helen,” I said to one of my best students, wiping my eyes, “will you finish passing out the cards?” The boys sat there with embarrassed, stiff faces, while the majority of the girls wept with me.

And so — as the sun slowly sinks in the west — adieu to Franklin School, and to my teaching career.

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Perhaps, to highlight the enormity of this incredible windfall, a little background fill is in order. Here goes:

Parents, both unlettered, my father a railroad worker when I was born. Daddy's father had sent him stateside from Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico, at age sixteen. Pancho Villa was terrorizing the countryside and conscripting kids twelve and up for cannon fodder in his rag-tag armies. *Andale, muchacho!* Trusting Jose to an older uncle, they worked their way to the US border, mostly on foot. At El Paso, Texas each paid a quarter and walked across the Rio Grande River on a makeshift bridge. (Honest, it was that easy then.) America, here we come!

On his way to Wisconsin, he worked as a railroad hand, coal miner, field hand, and a street vendor. In Oklahoma he was severely burned in the mines, and the girl in whose home he was boarding helped nurse him back to health. She was thirteen when they were married: he courted her with oranges and cheese. Honest. Nine months later brother John was born -- to live but 5 days. Dad must have lost the map somewhere along the way, because I didn't come along until she was 18, this in 1926. By then he was working at the Soo Line Railroad round house in N. Fond du Lac. Later he took a hellish job at a Fond du Lac tannery.

Mom helped him learn English, learning Español herself along the way. She taught him to read after a fashion. We lived in ramshackle houses in sort of a west-side ghetto of immigrant Greeks, Germans, Italians, and Mexicans. Came the Great Depression, we were even poorer — I took my little red wagon down to the Relief Agency on Brooke Street weekly and brought back surplus staples. They call it welfare nowadays.

We somehow lived through the Depression — hand-to-mouth though it was. In the '40s things picked up a little, Dad was back at the tannery at 25 cents an hour. Like dingbat Hoover had said: prosperity was just around the corner.

I scrounged junk from the alleys as a kid, worked in the sugar beets, and sold papers on street corners. I even became a soda jerk somewhere along the line. And yes, adhering to that timeworn cliché, I gathered coal along the railroad tracks. Hasn't everyone?

Flash forward to 1944, my senior year at Goodrich High. I was a so-so student, always antsy to quit and get a job. Nevertheless those *were* the golden years everyone still remembers with watery eyes. My forte was English and art — the rest was a monumental bore. Mary Anne Lackner, art- teacher-of-the-century, primed me for a Picasso career. Tessie O'Brien, my equally gifted English teacher, pushed me toward belle lettres. Though I'd known Fern since the seventh grade, we didn't really light any fires until graduation night, two weeks before I reported at Fort Sheridan, IL. You're in the army now!

The Tank Destroyer Corps has never been the same since. At North Camp Hood, I was the most fucked up soldier in history. I got through Basic without much fuss, sleeping through all my radio operator's courses — Texas was hot! A brief furlough in mid-November, and Fern and I got a bit cozier — she'd been writing right along. But when I reported back to Camp Hood in early December, things definitely went bass ackward.

By rights I should have been routed to an overseas outfit, but apparently they were up the Yazoo with radio operators. The advanced training company to which I was assigned consisted of the biggest band of misfits the army had ever seen. Hard cases, mostly stockade-bait, they needed sitting on in the worst way. Introducing Sergeant Watson and his goon boys — hard-core cadre freshly back from Kodiak, Alaska — who were supposed to shape us up in one helluva hurry. Needless to say, Watson and I didn't get along. Why me? I was a good boy.

I quickly discovered that my name was missing from the roster. Lights went on, and when the troops marched out of the company area daily, I was hiding behind the coal bins or drifting off to nearby, empty barracks, where I sacked out, read, dreamed, and sketched. Or I hit the post library — not what the War Department had in mind for me at all.

Eventually my drop-out tactics were discovered and life became suddenly more grim. How many latrines I scrubbed, how much brass I polished, how much extra KP and guard duty I pulled, how many weekend passes I

didn't get, is lost to memory. The mess sergeant and I thought we might get married. All of which I shrugged off, reformed not a whit. Every chance I got I was gone, sneaking up into the hills as we did field gunnery, lighting a small fire, reading and sketching while artillery shells rumbled overhead. Night map-reading projects found me dozing near the truck convoys, and waiting for the other eager beavers to check in. Some of my proudest moments occurred when officers (not a noncom-authorized capacity) lost their Saturday afternoons to oversee all the grenade throwing and pistol/rifle shooting drills I'd missed. Most favored son, indeed!

Interesting sidelight: One Friday night at the PX, too many 3.2 beers under his belt, Staff- Sergeant Watson picked a fight with a Navaho Indian malcontent out behind the PX. He lost so many teeth he had to have half his mouth rebuilt. The Indian went to the stockade, of course, but Watson was in the hospital for a week. When he returned he was considerably less mouthy. Many of these Camp Hood incidents showed up in *Sin Camp* (by Anthony Calvano, NB1545, 1961) and *Troop Tramp* (LB616, 1963).



One more furlough, then I was off to the ETO (European Theater of Operations), crossing on the *Queen Mary*, of all things. After a month of shifting from one repple-depple to another, I finally joined my outfit, B Company of the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Twelve days later the Nazis called it a day. And irony of ironies, my goof-off antics were vindicated. Would you believe? My radio was kaput! And since I was not a radio repairman – no tickee, no fixee! Oh shit! All those days of training, all those sweltering hours in radio classes, all my super attentive sessions learning (zzzz) radio operating procedures – all for naught! Sob!

Came occupation duty they had me guarding coal piles. When a school opportunity arose I signed up to attend Biarritz American University, Biarritz, France. Here I lounged for three months in Bay of Biscay paradise, living in a hotel, taking courses in Spanish, watercolor painting, and creative writing. They actually transported *real* professors overseas to teach we doggies; my writing prof was from University of Buffalo, my art teacher was from the Art Institute of Chicago.

Again, a revolting development. In my watercolor classes I was totally ignored. Professor Shopen never lingered at my easel and never put any of my paintings up. However, in my writing class I was the star; Professor Buckmaster couldn't say enough good things about my literary prowess. The other wannabes hated me.

It finally dawned on me that perhaps I was not born to paint cute little nudies, but was instead destined to *write* about them!

June 1946 found me discharged, looking for work in the old hometown, and courting Fern in dead seriousness. I worked as a quarry worker for 50 cents an hour, later as a heating/air conditioning slave – \$18 for a six-day week. Do the math. Later, during summers off from college, I did stints as a construction worker, garbage man, a gut-hauler for Darling Company, and an aluminum window installer.

Fern and I were married, poor as the proverbial church mice, in 1947. Love has smoked glasses for sure. What she ever saw in me, I'll never know. Had she skipped the nuptials she'd probably be president of Harvard by now. Smart! The word doesn't even begin to cover it.

It was Fern who insisted I utilize the GI bill and get a degree. Back then Uncle Sammy paid for the books, tuition, incidental college expenses, and showered their vets with a magnificent \$90 a month allowance. When the kids arrived, it went to \$100. *Aw, don't spoil the boy!*

Returning from the honeymoon, real life closed in. Again Fern was the smartie and convinced me that we should build our own home. With our own totally inexperienced hands. It was the wisest move of our lives; home equity featured in our financial progress from that day forward. She had \$250 in her bank account, just enough to buy a 50x100' lot on Fond du Lac's east side. We got a floating construction loan (on our good looks apparently; of collateral we had none). We paid to have the basement dug, and one of Fern's relatives came out one morning to supervise the footings, then a day later to lay the first course of concrete block.

Professionals laid the water and sewer lines and installed the furnace, and Fern's grandfather did the wiring. Other than that, we were completely on our own. If you could've seen me laying brick, building a floor-to-ceiling fireplace atop our basement roof! (The upper courses looked one helluva lot better than the first ones. On the job training with a vengeance.)

Our plan was to build the basement that first summer and fall, then close in the sub floor with tarpaper. We were finishing up when the first snow began to fall. And that leaky basement became our first enchanted cottage!

The next year I skipped a couple semesters at Oshkosh State Teacher's College and took a job as a screener at the Combination Door Company. Evenings and weekends that fall we worked shoulder to shoulder, and the house went up.

I still marvel that this little, 98-pound wonder could carry a concrete block in each hand, could mix mud and also lay blocks on her own. Even in 1951, preggers with Vianne, she climbed ladders and hammered nails stroke for stroke with me. With a bathroom, kitchen, two bedrooms semi-finished by that fall, we moved in.

Want specifics? Dimensions 24x32', approximately 750 square feet – classic American cracker box – total cost upon completion: \$5,800.

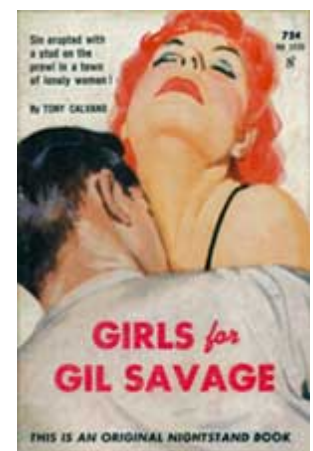
Most of our friends were in the same leaky boat, but we nevertheless had some wonderful parties in the unfinished living room, gathered around the fireplace, sitting on boxes, nail-barrels, and drinking wine and the only beer we could afford (Knapstein \$2.49 a case of longnecks), we gorged on pretzels and potato chips. Often we look back on those days and recall how happy we were despite the fact that we didn't have the proverbial pot to piss in.

So. To February 1961. Porn time!

Son Gregg was born in 1953. I'd long been relegated to the basement where I built an office of sorts. Borrowing \$1,000 from Fern's Mom, I purchased the first of two IBM Selectrics, which were eventually pounded into so much scrap. As the joke goes: "Ef ah's gonna be impotent, ah's gotta look impotent." Nothing but the best for a *professional!*

Right away there were problems. One, some of my friends, ignoring the sanctity of my calling, kept dropping in at the damndest times to chit chat. (Finally had to lower the boom.) Otherwise, I developed nerves, dread of deadly writer's block hovering (never happened), and had to get some meds for that. An ardent fisherman and outdoorsy guy, I wanted to translate that background into my output. (See *Girls For Gil Savage*, [NB1570, 1961].) And biggest boner of all, I made the deadly mistake of thinking I was writing literature, not schlock.

Thus when I turned in my next outline, another blue-sky epic, my rep at Scott Meredith (Joe Elder) came down hard. Enough of the north woods already! And, for God's sake, knock off all the fancy schmancy, 20-syllable words – my sesquipedalian tendencies were killing him. These were numbheads reading these books, they didn't know lugubrious from lasagna!



So, chastened, I hewed to getting sex into the books early, jamming *more* sex into *every* fucking chapter. A daunting challenge indeed, seeing as we couldn't use any explicit words at the time. "*He moved closer until their bodies touched, his hands feverish on her body.*" And when they did get down and dirty, you could only say, "*They did it.*" Later on, as Hoover really closed in, it became, "*They did that.*" Can you believe? When you compare it to the steamy humping shown prime time on some of today's TV shows?

My first *Nightstand* book needed a pen name, so I chose Tony Calvano, an actual dig at one of the most hated, insufferable jocks I'd ever known, the football coach at Goodrich Senior High. I wonder if the prick ever learned he'd been so ignominiously immortalized? (Oops, there I go again!)

And what about local notoriety? For the most part I kept the nature of my novels pretty much secret. I revealed the various (ensuing) pen names to no one. If anyone got nosy about what I was writing, I generally put them off with a blanket "Men's Adventure." (And ain't that the truth?) There were perhaps four or five of my closest friends who knew the real scoop and took it in stride. That Tom, what a one-track mind he's got! With a couple of my extra-horny buds I sometimes slipped them a copy of one of my latest (*Nightstand* was sending me twelve author's copies monthly) and requested feedback. Mostly they said I was right on track. Or called me on some subject matter technicality.

Otherwise, no sweat.

So on and on it went. I never encountered problem one turning out a book a month. Later on, as the first year passed, I was outlining, writing, and proofing a book in 10 days flat. I thought that was pretty speedy until I learned, later in my porno career, that some of my peers were turning them out in three and four days.

Then as now I was a shoe fetishist, I grooved on sexy lingerie. God, the lovely stuff I could now afford for my previously threadbare wife! I gloried in descriptions of same in my porn epics, going on for pages about needle-toed, stiletto-heeled pumps, shimmering, pointy, red, lace bras, and shiny hose. And this in the day when gals wore real stockings and garter belts, none of that dumb pantyhose. My heroes always took slow, slathering time divesting the heroine of her stockings, her girdle, and her exotic panties before hammering the lucky lady. Ouch! Just writing these lines gets me hot!

At first I did finish typing myself, but not too far into the Calvano Collection I decided I needed a break in between books and found a housewife typist who machine gunned them out for \$35 a book. When she got going – I still recall – it sounded like a popcorn factory at high noon.

As it turned out my Book-of-the-Month Club was a cinch. My first year I did 14 for *Nightstand*. Add to this two other mainstays I did for Charlie Heckleman at Monarch Books. Somewhere along the line I was informed that I could write as many books as I liked. Some years I churned out as many as 18 bedsheet fantasies for *Nightstand*. (Generic from here on, for the myriad house names Hamling's crew put out – fifty books a month!)

Well. It wasn't long before I found the money piling up. So much so that we decided that our handmade shanty wasn't good enough anymore. So we went house hunting. Finding nothing worthy of us, we eventually decided to build our dream house from scratch. In 1963 we sold our starter house and contracted for a palace out in the boonies, some eight miles from town.

We bought two acres of gorgeous woodland for \$2,000. Our contractor broke ground in March of 1963. We moved in on June 25 th of that year.

Our new residence was a two-story brick front, very contemporary, perhaps 2,200 square feet, and had four bedrooms, two and a half baths, a huge, beam-ceilinged living room, dining room, breakfast nook, and a fabulous kitchen. There was a basement rec room with full fireplace, same as the upstairs living room. Oh, the parties we had down there! And get this: total cost of our manse, including lot, well, septic field, and carpeting, came to a princely \$32 thou! Hell, you can't build a garage for that kind of dough nowadays.

We took the money from the sale of our Ashland Avenue house, borrowed money from Fern's Mom, I withdrew my teacher's pension money, perhaps two grand, and it all went into the kitty. Cash on the barrelhead. And, to use the *Evita* line: the money kept rolling in. Thus we were able to pay off our entire indebtedness *three* years later. And

didn't some of our snooty neighbors in the subdivision get their noses out of joint when we had a mortgage burning party that soon after moving in!

I expropriated one bedroom and turned it into a most spacious, comfortable office. The IBM Selectric smoked night and day and the sex novels kept rolling out.



Pornucopia, the house that porn built on two acres, wooded, country lot, Fall 1963. Lawn and landscaping still to come.

I had always wanted to thumb my nose at our uptight community, put a custom sign on the front lawn, and call our estate "PORNUCOPIA," but Fern would have none of it. Then after the Houston trial, when every paper in the country seemingly had my name on the front page – "Mild mannered schoolteacher testifies at obscenity trial" – I wanted to thumb even harder and build an even bigger sign. Nope.

Caution about shipping the novels was strongly impressed upon me; nosy Edgar and all his clumsy gumshoes lurking. I shipped the rough manuscripts to my typist in Madison via Greyhound bus. I actually used a fiberboard laundry case to send each precious baby off. Upon return, I packed the manuscript in heavy cardboard and put two layers of shipping paper around it. Then off it went, first class mail, to Blake Pharmaceutical, Evanston, IL, which was Hamling's corporate name at the time.

Only once during those first years was the Evanston office raided by the FBI, or so Meredith told me when I inquired after a missing batch of author's copies. Earl Kemp says it never happened. Otherwise things went smoothly. I'd send off my script, then perhaps two weeks later the check rolled in. I was banking \$400 and spending \$500 a month. Honest to God, you could live on \$500 a month then. Budgeting on a teacher's salary will do that for you.

As further example of the price of things back then, a new Oldsmobile came in at \$3,500, beer was a buck a six-pack, and good Bourbon \$3.50 a quart. (No liters then. All 90 proof.)

One strange thing: I was never allowed to communicate directly with my alleged editors; I must always relay my questions through Scott Meredith. Thus, to a great extent, I never knew whether or not I was highly/poorly regarded by these silent drudges. If I got a check every month, that became kudo enough. As the expression goes: "Kept in the dark and fed horse manure." Needless to say, money notwithstanding, this did affect my confidence, and I constantly wondered if I was a valued member of the "sleaze squad" or not. Even the slightest pat on the back would have helped my self-esteem



Spanking new 1966 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme. Second of two new cars we purchased midway through my porn career. Cost approximately \$3,500. Fall 1966. Fishing boat in background.

a ton. But this would change some years down the line.

Many of my alleged plots came out of my own fevered brain. But after awhile, as expected, I was bound to run out of ideas. Thus I took to borrowing plots from fellow authors. A couple examples: *Sin Camp* [by Anthony Calvano, NB1545, 1961] was a spin on James Jones' epic *From Here To Eternity*. Once I even stole some Buenos Aires carnival stuff from Rona Jaffe.

National Geographic became a major resource as I set my stories in every place under the sun – the diamond fields of Brazil, Arabian oil sheiks, Denmark, Germany, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Etc. Read the article, study the photos – my readers were there! My plots featured bootleggers, the aforementioned white slavers, mobbies of all sorts, the fashion industry, the cosmetics industry, and one even delving into the electronics racket – the first flat TV screen was featured in one of my novels. (Was I ahead of the curve or not?) Another book, based in Appalachia, later appeared on TV as *The Waltons*. Can you believe? Dirty crooks!

At least four of my books took place in Florida, which the wife and I visited often. Natural gas pipeliners (I did it,) school teachers, motel owners, a church choir, writing camps, artists – all became grist for my porno mill.

Whacko case: Late in my career – working for a tabloid outfit in Chicago at the time – I gave a lecture about my life as a porno writer to an English Lit class at some avant-garde city college, and ended up passing around several of my books. How they got my name, I'll never know. I brought it off well, I thought. At the end one student asked where I got my ideas. Feisty shit that I was at the time, I said, "From everyday experiences and observations. Tell you what, I'll write a book about this class and send it to Mr. Carpenter in a couple months." They got a big laugh out of that. Never happen.

There was a blind girl in the class, her German shepherd laying on the floor beside her desk. I made her the heroine. This porno guy joins the kids at a bar after class and gets to talking with her. Love blossoms. Taa-rah! I mailed a copy of the book, title *Debbie's Master* [Midwood 60104, 1972] to the instructor three months later. I never even heard back. But, hell, wasn't I used to that?

(Nightstand full up at the time, I managed to place the novel at Midwood Books, NYC.)



An overnight in Tijuana, Mexico (definitely on-the-scene research) on May 11, 1962 on my way to San Diego to do other library-lookup was used and embellished extensively in *Lust Slave* [MR457, 1962]. (See pps. 98-107 starting with "The Red Door.")

That night Fern and I somehow got suckered in by one of the gypsy cabbies – "Taxi to zee border, señor?" – who promised a party. What did we know? We ended up at a crib and were settled in a waiting room until the sleazy male host appeared to ask about our special kinks. Did we want to watch, how about a guy for the wife or a gal for me? Or maybe *ménage a trios*?

We settled for viewing a grainy, black-and-white porno film – made back when the men wore black socks during screw scenes – while on a couch across from us, another guy was doing pre-fuck drills with his Mexican whore. To this day I can still visualize that long, gloomy hall where we entered, looking down the line where the dozen-or-so prostitutes – many of whom couldn't have been over thirteen, fourteen – sat in chairs outside each crib, waiting on business.

I'd venture to say that Fern was the only lady in her social circle who could boast that (she didn't) she'd once spent an evening in a whorehouse. All in all, though panicky as hell at the start, she took it in her usual good stride.

The Mexico background was also featured in *Requiem For a Rapist* [by Gage Carlin, GS32, 1972] that I still remember as one of my better efforts. Rough, bloody, bloody vengeance, the kind of get-even you felt deep in your gut when the hero caught up with the baddies. But I digress. Back to the novels.

Although I am a classical music maven, when I wrote *My Master's Fiddling Stick*,

renamed *The Protégée* [by Tammy Calhoun, GK750, 1969, & GS47, 1972], I still did copious research. (Frankly I thought *Fiddling Stick* was one helluva lot more apropos than the dumb titles Kemp and Co. assigned.) I read up on the basics of violin techniques, makes of journeyman violins (a Nightstand heroine sure couldn't swing a Strad), the orchestral layout, conductor tics – on into the night. I was nothing if not precise. To this day still I marvel over that last chapter – magnifico tour de force – it was one of the best things I ever wrote, porno or not. Did anyone notice? Did anyone say, “Hey, good job, kiddo?” But it was a quirk of mine: I gave my best in anything I attempted. A dollar's pay and all that rot.



I remember that once Bill Hamling himself – through Scott Meredith of course – dictated a plot line for me. Twin sisters, one sold into white slavery, the other a successful career woman who seeks her long lost sister, and finds her, a debauched, raving loonie in a whore house. Breakthrough! The boss man finally acknowledging that I existed! As it turned out, that book, titled *Passion Pit* [by John Dexter, NB1600, 1962] (and damn it all to hell! – got stuck with the John Dexter byline instead of Tony Calvano) was one of the good ones. Some friends whom I let read some of my porno prose told me afterward that, all the crapola sex to the contrary, they were truly touched by the plot and characterization. (Even my lady typist, whom I'd adjured to close her eyes when typing the dirty parts, said the ending choked her up.) But did Hamling, did any of the fucking San Diego editors ever send a good word my way?

Nope. I may cry.

Such research, of course, had me reading voraciously during down time, getting authentic detail for the bootlegger book or for the Saudi Arabia opus . I studied up on the beauty industry, radio DJs, even the Haight-Ashbury scene of all things. I pored over texts on homosexuality, white slavers, and abnormal sex. I even read occasional pornos penned by cohorts Dean Hudson, Don Holliday, Allan Marshall, Marcus Miller, and numerous others. Maybe I could learn more about my trade from these masters. How conscientious can a guy get? How stupid?

So it went, year after year. Along about Nightstand number 70, I began to agonize over the sameness of it all. I was getting burned out. Was I going to be writing crotch the rest of my life? It got harder and harder for me to bring anything new to my novels. By this time (I once received a note from an editor asking for partial rewrite, and in an aside he asked why I was such a pussy in my sex scenes – couldn't I bring myself to write fuck, tits, cocks?) I was using all the words and, God, weren't they so deadly wearisome?

Early in the game the San Diego editors were ape-shit for swap novels. I must have written 30 at least. I even had a gang of church choir members, the parson even, staging full-scale sex orgies (*Thou Shalt Swap* [by Gage Carlin, CB688, 1970]). Not too far fetched at that, judging by current religious trends. Who says round collars can't have fun?

Finally, in desperation, I began lifting paragraphs, pages, even whole chapters from my earlier novels, and inserting them anywhere they'd work. At first I was cautious, and waited for an angry call from San Diego. But none ever came, so I went at it wholesale. Years later I learned that all they wanted was dirty words on a page, and who gave a shit about second-hand chapters? Sure, I still had to type the stuff, change names, but what the hell! Just think of what I might have been able to pull off had I owned a computer back then!



Late in the game Nightstand was facing a shrinking market. Enter the homosexual novels, enter Greenleaf Classics. Could I write some gay novels? And later on, could I imitate the long-winded, elitist John Desmond books? Or the old English pornographers like Frank Harris and his monumental *My Life and Loves*? They were still selling well – never try to account for the tastes of porno fans – so could I change pace and try these?

Well. I wasn't all that excited about writing homosexual books but, being a frustrated wordsmith, I was *eager* to try duplicating Desmond's style. I loved long, convoluted sentences, and as mentioned earlier I went nutso over big words. My big chance to show off. Enter Steve Savage.

As for the homo novels, I sat in a bar one long evening with a couple gay friends and took pages of notes. Voila! Now I could write gay.

One of my favorite Greenleaf Classics titles was *Barefoot Among the Virgins* [by Steve Savage, GC346, 1968] that was actually based on one of Dylan Thomas's besotted reading tours in the U.S. If Peter DeVries got away with it in *Reuben, Reuben*, why couldn't I? I went nuts with this magnum opus, writing the archest of exposition, sentences that went around the block, pedantic conversation, and cutesy-cutesy fuck scenes. I even wrote Dylanistic poetry. (Great cover by Harry Bremner!) I thought it came off rather well. But, other than a check, nary a peep from the far west.



Strange turnabout with these masterpieces: for once the Nightstand title mangler used some of my own titles, *Barefoot* being the first. Others were *In Search of Lust* [by Steve Savage, GC418, 1969], *The Daemon Lover* [by Steve Savage, GC387, 1969], *Puritan's Progress* [by Steve Savage, GC410, 1969], *Night of The Voluptuaries* [by Gage Carlin, LL827, 1970], and *Loins for Loan* [by Steve Savage, GC398, 1969]. Breakthrough!



Fast forward to June 1965 and the FBI visit. Came a call from Scott Meredith to the effect that the feds were moving in, and to expect a visit soon. When they called, I was to tell them absolutely nothing – be polite, but answer no questions. I got the runs, but fast. What could they do to me? I was assured nothing would happen – Hamling had the best lawyers in the nation; they'd cover my ass big time.

Shot across the bow. Let the witch hunt begin!

#

As predicted, I got ringy-dingy-number-one a week later. The FBI agent identified himself and told me he was calling from Milwaukee. He had a few questions to ask me.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I have representation and have been advised not to answer any of your questions."

The Fart, Belch, and Itch guy just about exploded. "You mean you're refusing to talk to an agency of the U.S. government?"

Very courteously: "I most definitely am."

"Well, we'll just see about that," he stormed. "I'm driving out to your house and I'll have a tape recorder with me to

take down your exact words as you refuse to answer my questions.”

“Fine, I’ll set up my recorder and get our conversation on tape also.”

He was at my door 30 minutes later. Milwaukee, hell; he was in the neighborhood all the time. Typical FBI; the agent might have caught me off guard had he suddenly appeared at my door. But his dumb phone call gave me time to gather my wits.

We sat in my huge, lovely, porno-paid-for living room, he in one chair, I in another. I had my reel-to-reel humming, a fresh tape at ready. But I never saw any trace of his recorder.

He was there perhaps ten minutes. He asked questions. I didn’t answer. He jotted in his notebook. Another question, no answer. Finally he got desperate, and get this – actually said, “Tell me, Mr. Ramirez, how would you describe yourself?”

Give me a break, Dad. “I’m sitting right here,” I said. “How would *you* describe me?” More frenzied jotting. He must have been paid by the word.

“How tall are you, how much do you weigh?”

No answer.

“Will you tell me about your schooling? High school? College?”

“I’m sure you have ways of uncovering that information.” My coolness amazed me. Had I not had advance warning, it would have been a different scenario completely.

No raised voice, no threats. Finally he picked up his briefcase, put away his notebook, and calmly said, “Good day, Mr. Ramirez.”

I escorted him out to our large circular drive. “If you head in toward the garage,” I offered, “then back up, you can drive out without any problem.” That was the sum total of the information I provided the FBI that day.

End of my first face-to-face with the FBI. I would have another some 20 years later, when I lived in Florida. Same thing. Stupid, stupid. And where did they find these ninnies? He even carried a bulging manila folder, which, I assumed, contained the Calvano files. I regret to this day that I didn’t ask if I might scan my rap sheets. I tend to be slow at times.

Mr. FBI had come to inquire about my telephone questions to the Jacksonville Naval Base, queries regarding underwater submarine escape tactics. This for a merc book I was writing at the time. “I’m a writer,” I told him. “I’m doing research for a novel.”

“Oh,” he said, and was almost immediately gone. *That* time a phone call would have sufficed. But no, waste government money by driving 200 miles to ask that single, dumb question. And we wonder how 9-11 came to pass.

Following the Wisconsin visit, there wasn’t repercussion one. I never had truck with Hoover’s stooges until a year later, and this only second-hand, behind the scenes in Houston.

In the meantime the books kept pouring out, one or two a month.

A year later, on July 5, 1966, the other shoe fell. I received two phone calls, one from Scott Meredith telling me that I would be receiving a call from a Los Angeles lawyer named Stanley Fleishman, who was with Nightstand. More than that he would not say. That afternoon Fleishman was on the phone. The gist of it: he wanted me to fly to Houston,



Fern and Tom Ramirez with springoffs, Gregg and Vianne. Christmas 1965.

Texas for a conference in regard to an obscenity trial involving some of my novels. Involved, hell! There were seven books cited, and four of them - *Passion Carousel* [SR543, 1965], *Orgy Club* [PB833, 1964], *Swap Sect* [NB1738, 1965] (don't those titles just kill you?), and *Shame Hunger* [PB850, 1964] were mine.



All expenses would be paid and I would be away three days. What would the conference entail? Just a minor point – we'd like you to appear as a witness for the defense. Oh, golly gee, I do that every day! Terror didn't take a holiday. I was assured that I *did not have to testify*, that decision would be left entirely to me. But that he *and* my publisher were hoping that I would. Sounded like a threat to me.

Panic time. However, Fleishman was most persuasive and I agreed to come to Houston.

I flew out of Oshkosh on August 7th at 4 PM and arrived in Houston by 8 PM. As I got off the plane, and the Texas heat hit me, I got a quick descent-into-hell feeling. How could people exist in heat like this? A cab waiting, I was shortly deposited at the Rice Hotel (now gone), one of the city's finest. I checked in, dumped my baggage, and immediately called Fleishman.

I was a bit surprised when I met Stanley downstairs. He was short – perhaps five feet tops – and though I never asked, must have suffered from polio or some such in his youth. He used a crutch under his right arm and moved with surprising agility. Stocky, with a large head, I couldn't help but think *gnome* as we shook hands. *He* greeted me effusively in a deep, crackling voice, and I liked him from the start.

We went to dinner in the hotel's Flag Room, about the fanciest restaurant I'd eaten in during my short life. (I was 40 at the time.) We had great steaks but no booze – Houston was dry. Conversation was general, Fleishman – a most brilliant, funny and charming man – mostly holding forth on what a put-up job the trial was. When I asked for particulars, he waved me off. "We'll have all the time in the world to talk tomorrow." As we parted after dinner, Fleishman gave me a card admitting me to The Press Room, a private club within the hotel where I could get a drink. "Or," he said, "go buy what you want in the hotel shops, sign for it. All expenses on Bill Hamling. Don't skimp."

I did neither, but just wandered around downtown Houston – sweltering even at 11 o'clock – for an hour, before returning to my room to call it a day.

That was on a Friday. (And how do I remember such details? Because I have kept a daily journal since I was 16.) Saturday morning at 9 we had a sumptuous breakfast, again in the Flag Room. I was introduced to a southern specialty, chicory coffee, which I loved instantly.

After breakfast we went to Fleishman's suite. What a mess. There were papers, books, and folders all over the place. We talked all morning, then again in the afternoon. When I told him that *Passion Carousel* [SR543, 1965] was based on a Hamburg, Germany sex club I'd read about in a man's magazine, his face lit up like a 50-cent stogy. Wonderful, wonderful, he kept saying, asking questions about the club nonstop. And when I told him that the religious sect featured in *Swap Sect* [NB1738, 1965] was also based on hard fact, he went ballistic, muttered words

to the effect that I'd saved his life. Also *Shame Hunger* [PB850, 1964] had basis in truth, a novel dealing with a business empire I'd studied extensively. He was ecstatic.

We would base our strongest arguments on this premise. Truth *is* golden.

Good old research to the rescue!

During that day other people wandered into the room – lawyers, publishers, even Richard Yerxa, Hamling's playboy step-son – and when introduced I was treated like royalty. Stanley and I spent the day going over the books – the crucial question hanging like Damascus steel – would I appear?

What about the pornos I should be writing, what about the money I'd lose if I agreed to testify? No problem, Fleishman assured me. Hamling had would pay me \$2 thou for my time, just as if I'd written two lost novels. How long would the trial last – I couldn't be away from my wife for that long a time. He had no idea when the trial would end, but never fear, Hamling is here. I could bring Fern along when I came back for the trial, again all expenses paid.



Fern and Tom Ramirez, Christmas 1966 in living room of the house that porn built. The Houston trial is only a bad memory.

Better and better. Before the afternoon was out, I signed on.

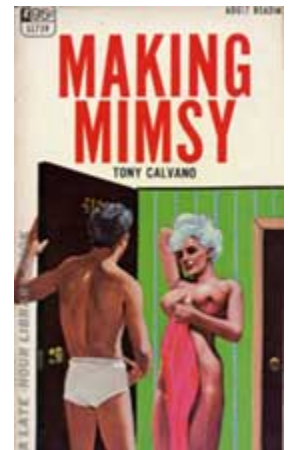
Fleishman would load me up with books, articles, and tracts, all dealing with dread pornography. I would read these at my leisure at home and get myself steeped in how contemporary writers were handling sex scenes. And how were my books that much different from these hardcover books that were acceptable to present day mores? Another box of books would be shipped to me when I arrived home. I would spend the rest of July doing nothing but reading these, formulating corollaries between modern day fiction and my own dreck.

I was getting paid to read books? I had died and gone to heaven!

That night I dined alone in the Flag Room – another choice steak. Fleishman and crew had other appointments to keep. After dinner I hoofed on down to a nearby theater and took in a movie. Coming back, I used my club card, had a couple lonely drinks in a cozy bar on the Rice Hotel's eighth floor, and didn't hit the sack until after one. My head abuzz, I didn't sleep very well.

That was the night that, around 2 AM, I was brought out a restless doze by the jangling phone. There was a girl on the line, weeping desperately, begging me to come help her, something terrible was happening. *I am not making this up!* Well, I was just too damned green to know what was going on – a salesman friend who flew all over the nation later told me it was a call-girl gimmick. Partly muzzy from the booze and stress of the day, I simply hung up on the maiden in distress.

Does that sound like a novel, or what? I let the idea simmer for a time, and six months later it was in Kemp's hands. (*Making Mimsy* [LL739, 1967]) I actually based it on the Rice Hotel layout – mobbies who had kidnapped a financier's wife – ya-da ya-da. Again, lotsa sex *but* a strong, exciting plot.



So, back to Wisconsin the following day, and almost a month straight of reading books, fiction and non-fiction – until semen was coming out my ears.

Some of the books I can still remember, most I can't. Things like William Burroughs, *Last Exit From Brooklyn*, Pauline Reage's *Story of O*, *The Velvet Underground*, by Michael Leigh, *Pretty Leslie*, by R.V. Cassill, *A Cold Wind*

in August, by Burt Wohl. There were many, many more – even some Genet and some Marquis deSade delicacies – the sort of sex lit deemed acceptable back in the '60s. Also I read a lot of Stanley Fleishman's articles defending pornography and other tracts, all the reading intended to raise my mettle and turn me into an invincible witness.

I must mention the frequent phone calls from Stanley himself, his attempt to bolster my morale. He knew I was scared shitless. *Corragio, Rodolpho!*

Add to that the daily Houston newspapers that arrived – the actual trial underway since July 10 th – keeping me abreast of developments. I was amused to read that the jury was being forced to read each and every one of the seven pornos on trial. Honest to God! Right there in the courtroom, Judge Joe Ingraham reading right along with them, telling them to turn the page almost. It took them a week to get through all of them. Ridiculous!

I had random wonderings – were they enjoying my stuff? Or were they too uptight to let their hormones rage. Were clandestine romances triggered within the sanctity of that jury room? Jurors disappearing under the table? Another plot idea.

But in final summary – God's truth, the nonstop reading for the most part bored me out of my skull. However, on the plus side, I was no longer ashamed of my porno efforts – I realized I was swimming in the mainstream whether I knew it or not.

Daughter Vianne was 16 at that time, totally capable of babysitting son Gregg, keeping the household on even keel the eleven days we were gone. Confident in her abilities, we left for Houston on August 2 nd. Arriving at 9 PM, Stanley Fleishman unavailable upon our arrival, we settled in, had a couple drinks, and then went to bed.

The next nine days were both exciting and boring. The boring part came when I was told to keep reading the damned books, the exciting when I was in conference with Stanley, or when, the last few days, I sat in on the trial itself. I would not appear until around August 9. A couple of evenings we were on our own, and we took in movies, drank in the Press Room, or indulged in our rooms, having charged a quart of Old Granddad, and a quart of vodka to our room tab. Thanks, Mr. Hamling!

Quite a gang of witnesses wandered in and out of Stanley's room those days, some witnesses, some Greenleaf Publishing employees. We met expert witness Wardell Pomeroy, who was second honcho on *The Kinsey Report*, Ian Ballantine, the Ballantine Books publisher, Dwight V. Swain, Professor of Journalism at University of Oklahoma, Roger D. Chittick, Professor of Literature, Fresno State College, all of whom were violently opposed to government censorship. I was among distinguished company indeed.

Newton Schwartz was another of Fleishman's co-counselors during the trial, but must have been a shadow because I have no recollection of him. However, Percy Foreman (of Candace Mossler murder trial fame) was on hand, and performed brilliantly when not rocking the court with jokes and sly allusions as to the sex savvy of some of the Justice Department witnesses. A huge bear of a man, he was most friendly to Fern and me, and one night – along with Fleishman and Hamling – invited us to dinner in the Flag Room. That night we had cocktails, this because Foreman had private stock stashed in a restaurant cubbyhole, hard liquor allowable under such circumstances.

And, of course, I did get to spend some time with Bill Hamling. Again bending over backward to be friendly. Several times he joined the group for dinner. It was during one of these evenings that I drew him aside and asked if Scott Meredith was absolutely necessary; could we do an end run? I was amazed at how readily he agreed. He would call Meredith the next day. He absolutely glowed, his expression almost vengeful. More on this later.

I remember especially another festive late night in The Press Room, drinking with Ian Ballantine, a bushy browed troll, who regaled us nonstop with publishing industry anecdotes and tales about well-known authors. Ever the opportunist, I mentioned a mainstream novel I had in progress; if I submitted, would he see to it that it got a decent reading? He promised that he would. But when I later mailed portion and outline to his attention, it was back an hour later. So much for connections.

As a witness I was not allowed into the courtroom until after my testimony. (But Fern was privileged, and she returned with fascinating sidelights. To her mind we were already winning.) Thus my contacts with Fleishman were infrequent. At last three times, court being in recess, I met with him in his room, and we rehearsed mock witness

stand drills, Stanley bearing down on the posit that my novels *did* have literary merit. Next he became prosecutor and nailed me with embarrassing questions, jabs meant to anger me, and taught me how to dodge such Justice Department feints.

He stressed that I must not come on smart-ass, but react calmly and professionally to all questions asked. I can still remember his angry protests when I tried answering his questions at length. “No,” he hammered, “just answer the question yes or no, and offer nothing more. Let *me* come back with more questions which will allow you to enlarge on your comments.” If I *ever again* appear in court, this admonition will be branded on my forehead.

When Stanley and I weren’t in conference, it was back to the drawing board. Now I was plowing through Henry Miller’s *Sexus* and John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*. God, the way Miller threw words around! Every day another book was delivered to my room. I was even told to keep note cards on salient points, and cross reference same. This, supposedly, to reinforce the corollaries that Stanley hoped to imprint on my alleged brain.



Fern and Tom Ramirez, living room, 1966.

Another big surprise. Fleishman was so pleased with Fern’s forthright, cheery personality that he later prevailed upon her to appear as a witness also. (Hamling *did* get his money’s worth!) Which was duck soup for her. Like most women, she loved being in the spotlight – even at an obscenity trial. What intrigued Stanley was Fern’s church activities, her American pie house-wifely virtues, and the fact that she, too, had been a schoolteacher. Also relevant: Fern proofed for me, helped, at first, with finish typing, and also brought home tidbits of gossip from female friends that often sparked the old imagination and eventually surfaced – hyped up to be sure – in ensuing Nightstands.

If there was anything about our adventure that turned her off it was the air conditioning in our hotel room. It was Antarctica. Constant complaints availed us nothing; the maintenance people would putter and leave, with nothing changed. Finally we had to leave the window open during the day. I can still see Fern reading with her bare feet sticking out the window.

Also, it seemed that the room next door was a party room, and night after night we were kept awake into the wee hours. Finally we asked to be moved. Which took care of that, but even so, the new quarters were still meat-locker cold.

So the days fled by, with Fern in court prior to becoming a witness, touring Houston with Doris Fleishman, and I stuck in my monastic study, reading sex by the hour. As I said we went out with the gang most nights. One special night Stanley took us all to a super ritzy Houston restaurant called Maxim’s. Fern and I were simply awed. God, what that party must have cost Hamling! Another night we went out with Richard Yerxa, Hamling’s step-son and some flashy babe he’d picked up in Houston. She was a knockout. Even so Yerxa came onto every waitress in the place, his hand up her skirt. To this day I still remember one of the ranchos he told at the table. Somewhere along the line, I used the term “anal aperture” to describe one of the prosecution witnesses. Which tore Richard up. “A Calvano classic,” he laughed. “Wait’ll I tell dad.”

Finally, D-Day, August 9 th. I was scheduled to appear at 1:30 that afternoon. And suddenly all the drills with Fleishman were for naught. I had cold feet, but bad. But at the last minute: reprieve, the morning’s witness was being brought back for a second week.

So. Wednesday, August 10. We got to court by 8:30 and I got an even worse case of the jeebies. The room was huge, imposing, and terrifying. Ian Ballantine took the stand at 9, and Stanley, then Morton Susman, the fed prosecutor, took their best shots. Ballantine acquitted himself well, seasoned pro that he was. I only hoped I could do half as well.

He was done by 10:15, and after a brief recess, I marched up to the stand in my best suit and tie, with a bundle of

books under my arm. I was sworn in and fought to keep my voice even. Stanley was slow and quiet, easing me into a rhythm. I was shaky at first, but shortly regained my cool, the whole thing gradually becoming almost conversational. I was on the rest of the morning and the best part of the afternoon.

I won't venture expansive detail, there was just too much going on. When I looked toward the jury, I was amused by their bug-eyed stares, almost as if they'd expected me to be sporting horns and a tail. There was a ripple in the room as I identified myself, then told them I was *the* Tony Calvano, author of zee feelthy books.

Fleishman was outstanding. He led me like a trick pony. First we talked about my background, education and prior employment, dwelling a bit overlong on my teaching career. And how had I come to begin writing for my publisher? Next we got into my writing habits, how long it took me to write a novel, where did I get my ideas? Did I agree that my novels had no social redeeming value?

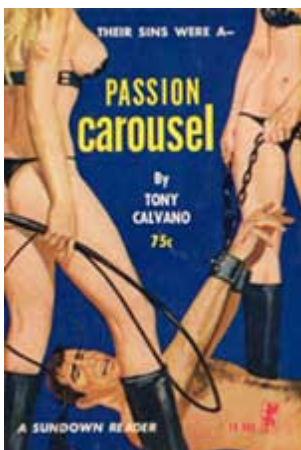
We were starting on a breakdown of one of my books, *Shame Hunger* [PB850, 1964], just before the noon recess. I first defended it by citing the lack of crude language and four-letter words in any of my books, unlike *Sexus* (hold it up), currently available in bookstores everywhere, which was an outhouse of gross terminology. Then Stanley led me into technique; were the books poorly written, the only reason for their existence being exploitation of sex? I calmly opened *Shame Hunger* and began with the opening paragraphs – one at a time – in which I introduced my main character, hinted at problems in her life, and a possible excuse for her descent into *sin*. Paragraph after paragraph, chapter after chapter, developing my critique carefully. Motive, characterization, resolution – Stanley and I went right down the line, stressing that sexual references were almost inconsequential to the larger framework of the novel. (And how this extra verbiage had pissed off Earl Kemp and company all these years!) The heroine sacrifices for the sake of her husband's career, suffers, is punished, and emerges a better person, ready to try again, redeem herself as best as she can.



And strongest wraparound of all: a damned strong *plot*. We danced around that with chapter and verse, reviewing the plot in a-b-c terms.

Then there was the matter of my representation of the industrial setting, inter-office intrigues, reflecting solid research, a depiction of real life as lived in the modern day business world. Again and again Stanley led me to the corollaries between my writing and other contemporary prose available. Our note cards came through big time. "Now if you'll look at chapter two in *Cold Wind in August*, by Burt Wohl, you'll see a similar situation, with less attention to characterization, the sex scene even more explicitly expressed." English Composition 101.

"You're doing great," Stanley encouraged at lunch. "You had the jurors hanging on your every word. Hell, it was like they were understanding the book for the first time."



The afternoon session came off equally well, even though I was getting bored, wondering if the jurors were feeling the same way. You've proved your point, Mr. Porno, move on. Still we plodded through two of my novels that way, before we turned to the next exhibit.

"As I understand it, Mr. Ramirez," Fleishman flicked the whip, "these books are, for the most part, based on fact, things you've researched extensively."

We worked that territory for another fifteen minutes. "Yes, *Passion Carousel* [SR543, 1965] is based on present day sex clubs existing in Hamburg, Germany." I went into it so completely that you'd think I'd actually been there myself. The jury really woke up when I described (clinically, of course) some of the perverted things that actually transpired. In Germany, folks. In this day and age. Believe it.

Next we talked about the business environment in *Shame Hunger* [PB850, 1964]. I cited a couple of non-fiction books I'd studied to learn about these inner workings, the politics, the low-down-and-dirty it takes to succeed in business without really trying.

Around 3 PM the pony was running down. Stanley sensed this and excused me. I braced myself for a vicious attack from prosecuting attorney Susman. But it didn't happen. I'd presented my case so well – wakened empathy and sparked second thoughts among the jurors – that he probably decided it was the better part of valor to give me short shrift. He asked me a dozen perfunctory questions, which I addressed with equal boredom, and that was it.

I sat in the audience after that with other witnesses and watched as Fern took the stand. She carried it off beautifully, was cute and charming, slightly on the flighty side, totally convincing the jury that she felt no shame that her husband wrote allegedly dirty books. When she perkily detailed how she worked side by side with me when needed, proofing, typing, and encouraging – the loyal, dutiful wife – the jury almost puddled up. She also had been a schoolteacher, she informed, and was even now working as a substitute teacher at many Fond du Lac schools. Then came the clincher, the fact that her Sunday School lessons were being published and sold to churches all over the U.S., and that she was a longtime member of the Altar Guild at St. Paul's Cathedral – How can this boy be wrong?

She was on the stand for fifteen minutes. I hugged and kissed her when she came down; I'm sure the jury took that in. We *were* human after all. The other witnesses were clapping us both on the back.

Around 4 the prosecution summoned its first witness, David Westheimer, who had written eight novels, his current bestseller being *Von Ryan's Express*. Prior to that he'd had big sales on *Sweet Charley* and *This Time Next Year* which contained a full quota of steamy passages. But, according to Davey, that was okay, because his books were literature, mine weren't.

I sort of took a mild dislike to him right away.

"These books by Calvano are dishonest," he asserted, "because they don't use the vulgar, four-letter words used in honest, contemporary fiction. The writer is patently trying to hide behind this argument to refute the obscenity charges that have been brought before the court."

Well, I'll be go to hell. Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Next he had the extreme audacity to say, "The Calvano books are very poorly written. The characters are one dimensional, like cardboard figures."

Ouch! Oh, David, you can be so cruel.

Westheimer was on for an hour, and then Jolly Joe Ingraham recessed until 9 AM the next day – Thursday, August 11 th .

Wardell Pomeroy, Dwight Swain, Ian Ballantine, Bill Hamling, Fern, and I had a few celebratory drinks afterward in Stanley's suite. Stanley set up a couple of bottles, brought in ice and extra glasses, and we conducted a riotous postmortem on the day's events, especially bearing down on Westheimer's opening testimony. "Rat-fink" was the most commonly used term. Ballantine and Hamling, especially, were livid. "I'll get the word out in New York," Ballantine stormed. "That fucker will never publish another book." Hamling agreed, vowed to burn up the lines talking to legit publishers he knew, and call in some shady markers.

Whether the proposed boycott ever materialized, I can't say. Did Westheimer encounter tough sledding in the months and years after the trial? A Google search brought up several other recent Westheimer novels, none of which are familiar to me. But I do know that *Von Ryan's Express* was his last bestseller.

Fern and I were two happy puppies however, Westheimer's nasties to the contrary. Our part in the trial was over, and as far as we knew, we'd acquitted ourselves well. Fern, like me, voiced amazement at her ease on the stand once the questions started.

Stanley Fleishman was as boisterous as I'd ever seen him. "We'll cut that bastard to ribbons tomorrow," he vowed, his eyes definitely vengeful.

Afterward, all of us slightly squiffed, we went to dinner, and the happy talk went on. Stanley bowed out early; he had some heavy preparations for tomorrow to attend.

However, once Fern and I returned to our room, bad news. Making our daily call home to see how Vianne was faring, we learned that news of my appearance at the trial had hit the local rag, The Fond du Lac *Commonwealth Reporter*, and also the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, and the Milwaukee *Journal*. "Reporters have been calling all day," she wailed. But, God bless her, Vianne had had enough smarts to give them a brisk, "No comment," and hang up. We sensed stress in her voice. What kind of shit-storm would she and Gregg run into upon returning to school come fall?

And how could we be so naive as to believe that the AP ticker wouldn't spit sparks when the "Fond du Lac, WI writer appears at Houston obscenity trial" banner rolled out? For a hokey city like Fond du Lac, this was monumental newsbreak. *Honest to God*, it had never crossed my mind that report of my notoriety would hit the Wisconsin papers. We were in Texas, a continent away, how would they ever learn about our appearance at the Houston trial? Newspapers all over the U.S. had a field day with the story. An ex-schoolteacher writing porn? Whatever is this world coming to?

Again. Shows how dumb I was. And probably still am.

So the day's ephemeral victory was smashed all to hell. We went to bed with heavy hearts and sense of dire foreboding chilling us.

When I told Fleishman the unpleasant news the next morning before court, he only laughed. "Nothing's stale as old news. That story'll be ancient history before you get home. Don't let it worry you. If they've slandered you in any way, get back to me. I'll take care of it." Small consolation.

Stanley was brilliant in court that day. He and Percy Foreman held poor Westheimer on the stand all morning and far into the afternoon. Foreman, indefatigable jokester, kept the court in stitches. One exchange stands out, this when Westheimer said my plots were improbable.

Foreman: "Would you say that the Bible is literature?"

Westheimer: "Yes, indeed."

Whereupon Foreman launched into a lengthy diatribe regarding sensationalist, improbable accounts in the Bible. He reminded the court of how Lot threw his two virgin daughters to a mob to be ravished. Afterward the daughters got Lot drunk and seduced him, so they could bear his babies.

"Then there was Ahasuerus, who had sex with 3,000 virgins before settling on Esther as his queen. Would you call these accounts improbable?"

"Yes," Westheimer replied lamely, "in today's society they would be improbable."

"And what about Biblical times? Improbable?"

A long silence ensued. "I can't say if they'd be improbable," he said, badly rattled. "I wasn't there."

"I should hope so," Foreman shot. The courtroom roared with laughter.

So it went all day, and Westheimer didn't look quite so cocky when he left the stand this time. Foreman, flush with victory, invited Fern and me, Fleishman and Hamling to dinner that night. A great way to spend our last night in Houston!

On Friday we flew home, dread growing stronger with every passing mile. But if we expected to become instant lepers upon arrival home, we were most pleasantly surprised. One of our dearest friends invited us and two other couples in our circle to dinner that night. Hail the conquering hero! Nothing had changed; we were still among the

living. We regaled them with trial anecdotes into the wee hours.

We skipped church that Sunday, reluctant to show our faces. When we did show up, our good pastor – as did most of our church friends – greeted us warmly and asked why we hadn't come last Sunday. Allied Authors, a Milwaukee writer's group to which I belonged, also refused to black ball me. They'd known all those years what I was writing, and accepted it openly. Any guy who could write a novel – any kind of novel – in ten days was a consummate pro in their eyes.

While *my* parents knew the exact nature of my writing (and disapproved), we'd never told Fern's mother. So she was much put out when her prissy friends began calling. "Letty, did you see what was in the paper last night?" She had attacked poor Vianne over the phone when the story broke; it was clearly time to level with her. It was one of the toughest conversations in our lives. Afterward, however, she actually asked if she could read one of my books. We said yes, but never kept our word. She never asked again. She'd have died of a stroke!

In the days following the status remained very quo. On the Monday following our return, we packed up and went camping with the kids for a week. That quiet time in the north woods was just the ticket; we unwound and came down slowly. On Thursday, August 25, I was back in the office outlining my next Nightstand book. The next day I pitched in, and the novel *Diamante* (***Jungle of Desire*** [SR623, 1966], the Brazilian diamond mine story, went off to my typist on September 1.

My Houston *Chronicle* subscription still in force, I kept tabs on the trial, now in its 40th day. Can you believe – the jury was out nine, goddamned days! Then, on Friday, September 2nd came a call from Stanley joyously informing me that the trial was over, and we'd won! (And thank you so much for the part you and Fern played.) The jury, after all that time, was still hopelessly deadlocked. Finally Ingraham called it a day and declared a mistrial – we had been acquitted! The judge's parting shot to the federal prosecutors: "I would advise that the U.S. Justice Department take a long, hard look at this case ... before trying it again." Vindication on both fronts.

But if there was excitement and elation, there was also a downside. For, not more than an hour later I received a call from Scott Meredith's office. Somebody definitely had his shorts in a bind. And how did I think I was going to get away with dissolving their agreement with William Hamling? We went around and around for about ten minutes, and ending with threat of a lawsuit. Which quickly put the fear of God into me, and I made hasty calls to both Fleishman and Hamling. Each assured me that it was a done deed, and don't give Meredith a second thought. From now on my checks would come directly from San Diego.

I was later to learn the reason for Hamling's eagerness to dump Meredith. Not only was he taking \$100 commission/plus expenses from me, but he was also gouging Hamling for an extra \$200 on each book. The bastard had been making out like a bandit! And all the time I'd gratefully thought he'd been looking out for *my* best interests.

But Scott Meredith did have revenge of sorts. Payments of approximately \$450 on two short stories he'd placed for me arrived with a shithouse full of commission and expense deductions. My final take came to a mere \$180.50. I was pissed, but shrugged it off. Small enough price to tell the vulture to fuck off.

The next day I checked the local paper to see how they'd handled the mistrial news. Yep, there it was on the very last page, not more than five column inches. Far cry from the front-page hatchet job they'd done on me. I called the editor and royally read him off. Fuck the press!

Once the trial was over things in the Nightstand offices took a wicked turn. Full of braggadocio over the verdict, the wraps came off to some. Four-letter words – shit, cunt, cock, fuck – were abruptly in. *Carte blanche a la mode!* But I was never told this, I kept using my time-worn euphemisms. Eventually I began to see the change in books done by my peers, but ever cautious, I held off. It wasn't until six months later, upon reading the afore-mentioned, offhand comment by an editor unknown, that I learned I could let it all hang out.

And oh, yes. On July 31, 1967, toward the end of a five-week cross-country driving tour, I finally visited the Nightstand offices in San Diego. Where I was given pretty much the cold shoulder by Earl Kemp and various other people I was introduced to. While I now know about the pleasure dome Bill Hamling occupied on an upper floor, I was totally underwhelmed by the porn factory layout itself. Hamling was gracious enough to come downstairs around noon and take Fern and me to lunch. After lunch, Fern and I returned to the plant, where we were given a

tour by a flunky, and saw how the books were handled from arrival to shipment to the printer. This impression remains, as well as the disclosure at that time that the “Porno Factory” was turning out 50 obscene novels a month. And like wow! Probably this accounts for the fact that I never got a good/bad editorial word from any of my editors. But wouldn't you think -- after 10 years -- one kind word somewhere along the line?

However, if I'd expected -- during the visit -- to get some pointers from Kemp or any of the other editors, or a few words of encouragement for my sterling efforts, I was, as always, disappointed.

And a final puzzler: never an explanation on why I'd been kept under a bushel basket all this time, and fed rotten carrots. Earl Kemp once explained to me that Bill Hamling had set me aside for an upcoming trial and kept me virginal for that reason alone. And yeah, like he had me spotted way back when, like he knew my books would be seized shortly before the Houston trial. Eternal mystery. I'll still be scratching my head the day they plow me under.

#

So the years passed, and by February 1972, I had written 145 novels for Nightstand, which averages out to roughly 14 a year. My last novel, *Requiem for a Rapist* [by Gage Carlin, GS32, 1972], was accepted after a hiatus of perhaps a year. The Houston and Redrup trials had opened, much to our dismay, a Pandora's box, and now porno videos became the stroke addicts' main outlet. Who wanted to read and pump when they could get the same thrills watching their TV monitor -- no pages to turn. And sound besides. So the market for porno books went down the toilet. The going price was now \$600 a crack -- when you could cadge an assignment -- which fee I rejected.

I turned to other houses and was able to place, sporadically, a few more books. Midwood was paying \$1,200, but they were hit-and-miss. Once I flew to NYC and sat down with Maurice Girodias, famed “Father of Porn,” but my stuff apparently didn't stiffen his wicket. Earlier I visited David Zentner, who published Bee-Line Novels, with nothing coming of our chat. At the end there I even wrote a porno for a gent in Switzerland who wanted me to move there and write full time for him. I passed. *Despoiled in the Desert* was a doozy, and he sent me \$1,500. I never received author's copy one; never heard from the guy again. How he got my name I'll never know.

My porno swan song.

Desperate for stability, Fern definitely panicky, I answered an ad in the *Chicago Tribune*, went in for a tryout, and got the job. The move from Fond du Lac to the Chicago suburbs was traumatic, but we survived it. Vivid picture of me in the backyard during those last days, at the burning barrel, chunking hundreds of my Nightstand and Greenleaf books and watching them flare up, remains to this day. Too bulky to move, I had room for two copies of each title, which I retain to this day. Two huge boxes in the basement, bold X's printed on each. Hernia time when I bring them down from the shelf for whatever reason.



As I understand it some of those old pornos bring a good price today. Too soon *oldt und* too late *schmardt!*

Summer 1970 saw me at a Chicago tabloid outfit called National Features Syndicate, first as a writer, then assistant editor, and finally articles editor. It was a zoo scene, with a capital zoo, all the animals running loose, doped out, professional nit-wits. Some weeks I wrote half of whichever paper I was assigned to at the time, while the chimps

were allowed to fuck off. (Another novel?) We put out three papers, *The National Tattler*, *The National Insider*, *The National Exploiter*, then off in one corner, behind steel bars, worked the zanies who produced a porn tabloid coyly called *Candid Press*. The owner of the company must have been smoking prime weed, for he coddled grandiose illusions of one day overtaking *The National Enquirer*. Fat chance!

In May 1973, drinking too much and verging on a breakdown, I quit and moved to Florida. Where, of all things, I got involved in the bed shaker business. You remember Magic Fingers, those wonderful vibrating beds? I built up a string of hotels using my gadgets, worked my route only 45 days a year, and netted a steady \$15 thou per year. Not a bad racket, though I wasn't proud of telling people what I *really* did for a living.

Still writing on the side, I tried peddling a couple pornos to Nightstand and some other houses still hanging in, but no go.

Desperate for extra income, I submitted leads to the *National Enquirer*, then located in Lantana, Florida. Crazy happenstance: a week later I got a call from an editor asking if I was the same Ramirez who'd once worked at National Features in Chicago. Yeah, that was me. "Well," he said, "you remember James Parker? (Not a real name.) Do you remember firing me a couple of years back?" Parker had been a stringer who'd somehow gotten on the wrong side of the editor. As assistant ed, I was the designated hitter. "Now the shoe's on the other foot, huh, Tom?"

The upshot was that he forgave and forgot and assigned one of my leads. Over time he became a good friend and my main editorial contact; he did well by me. Thus began a 20-year run with *The National Enquirer*. I was brought in twice on staff tryouts – reporters start at \$75 grand these days – but never managed to make the cut. Not ruthless enough. So I had to settle for my feast-or-famine existence. At times I was working six stories at once, other times no assignments for a month. They occasionally flew me around the U.S. to cover medical conventions, hoping I'd generate breaking medical stories. Which I did now and then. Mostly they were fast, good pay. A few times I got a grand for a ten-hour story; I couldn't complain.

In between *Enquirer* assignments I wrote three merc novels for a Harlequin spin-off, Gold Eagle Books. The team of hard cases I wrote about was called Phoenix Force. For the first time in my writing career I earned royalties. There was an author's house name on the cover and a "With special thanks to Thomas P. Ramirez," on the back of the title page. I finally hooked up with Ballantine Books (Ian Ballantine long gone), and did a pseudo-detective series – *Take One For Murder* – supposedly written by soap opera doyenne Eileen Fulton. Again, a "special thanks" slug, but no more. The bitch editor and I locked horns and I was gone after three books. She tried three different writers, pissed them off as well, and the series died with book six.

When not working on *Enquirer* assignments and the already mentioned contract novels, I did chapter-and-portion on several other novels. Which, sad to say, never found a home. Today they reside in my "someday" file cabinet – at least six of them. Horror, romance, crime, and even some leftover pornos. Call me up.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot. There was another business venture in the mid '80s when I became silent partner in an Orlando copy shop with a character who was supposed to know what he was doing. He bought me out after a year or so. I didn't make any money, but didn't lose any either. When the IRS paper work got too sticky, I said screw it.

I sold off my bed shaker route also (a couple oddball novels could certainly come out of that enterprise) and moved back to Fond du Lac in 1989. I continued stringing for *National Enquirer* until 1993 when I retired and learned to live on Social Security, plus income from our investments. Fern's Mom died in 1998 and left her a nifty inheritance. We used part of that, plus sale of a gang of stocks (before the 1999 meltdown, thank God) to build our final dream house in yet another secluded retreat eight miles from town. Now in our late 70s, we continue to live the good life. Grow old with me, and all that jazz.



I have not written anything of real length since 1985, this autobiog probably my last magnum opus, done as special favor to the ever-taciturn, unbending Earl Kemp. Now and

then I still drag out some of my pornos and skim through a few pages. Granted, I am my own best critic, but I still think some of them were damned solid efforts, subject matter notwithstanding. The descriptions, the character buildup, the ever-changing locales, and the genuine, sometimes suspenseful plots –

And yes – the sexy shoes and lingerie. Yikes!

Lift high your glass, and toast – Yay, porno! Where would I be today without you?



Tom and Fern Ramirez in family room of their new home prior to leaving to attend their 60 th high school class reunion, July 2004.

Hell, pros and cons like that will put you in the rubber room in a helluva big hurry. Maybe if I hadn't counted on porno for my daily bread, I might have written the Great American Novel. Then again, maybe not. Every time I sent out what I considered a good mainstream novel, it came back with the strings still hot. But if it was a contract book, it was instant hit.

Or I'd be living today on a teacher's pension – \$3,000 is what Wisconsin retirees receive monthly these days – and enjoying the hell out of it.

But, on the other hand, if I'd stayed in my teaching harness, what crazy adventures I'd have missed.

And if my uncle had tits, he'd be my aunt.

Yeah, round and round you go. Read the sign: *YOU ARE HERE*. And fuck the daydreams.

Take it as it comes, Dad. Nobody ever promised you a rose garden. Be thankful you're still on the green side. All sorts of crap like that.

Philosophy *de jour*, guys.

All photographs courtesy Thomas Ramirez Collection. All cover scans courtesy Bruce Brenner, <http://www.vintagepbks.com>.

Writers get to treat their mental illnesses every day.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Odd Man Out....*

Or,
The Last of the Red Hot Papas

By Earl Kemp

The Black Box pornography writers were legends when judged by today's standards. Those hardy, horny, probably talented protégés of Scott Meredith in the late 1950s and well on into the '60s, hiding behind Henry Morrison, hiding behind a Grand Central Station post office box.

They turned out, eventually, to be big-time writers like Evan Hunter, Hal Dresner, Don Westlake, Larry Block, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and on and on. They wrote exciting, stimulating, tension-relieving one-hand books for the talented reader under such names as Dean Hudson, Don Holiday, Alan Marshall, Andrew Shaw, Marlene Longman, and on and on.

Their ranks included some of the brightest stars of the sleaze cosmos, including people like Dave Case, William Coons, Dave Foley, John Jakes, Milo Perichitch, Art Plotnik, the ever-popular Robert Silverberg, and on and on.

Plus the all-time, world-champion, editor pleasing, mister wonderful, William "Clyde Allison" Knoles.

Intermixed among the crowd was one noticeable standout...the manuscripts of Tony Calvano. There wasn't anything unusual about them from the very beginning, except that unlike most of their contemporaries, they actually had real-life, reader-identifiable plots. He was very consistent and whatever else you could say about Tony, he never missed a deadline, just turning out those sleazy potboilers one right after the other...very prolific, very efficient, and very reliable.

Those were some of the things that made Calvano stand out from the usual Meredith fodder; he was different. I wasn't to know how different for a very long time, and then it all just sort of made sense to me...finally....

I didn't know who those writers were, initially, because Meredith kept their identities hidden from me. In some cases, it took me years to find out the names of the real people behind those pseudonyms we were using with ever increasing frequency week by week. There was a constant demand for more and more writers, manuscripts, books... glorious r*e*l*i*e*f!

#

FLASHFORWARD....

When I was dragged out of my secret hiding place, kicking and screaming, and shackled to a steady diet of ego regenerating appreciation, I resolved again to start writing my memoirs again. Only that time I actually did begin the writing process.

First, I tried to locate all those old criminals and co-conspirators left over from the Scott Meredith Literary Agency who made the entire sleaze period possible in the first place...and only a few turned up. Lots of them had died, of course, leaving big gaps in the past.

As my writings began to be posted through my ezine *eI* on Bill Burns' incredible [eFanzines.com website](http://eFanzines.com) yet even more of them turned up and contacted me. People I hadn't heard from in half a century turned up...with loaded memories and scrapbooks...with copies of their books that hadn't been seen in decades. And all along there was one significant standout again, and again that man was Tony Calvano.

When each old friend from the past appeared, "Who and where is Tony Calvano?" was the first question out of my mouth.

It was among the first questions always asked of me as well, by book collectors, bibliophiles, librarians, archivists, etc.

The answer to the question was easy...except not one of us knew it.

Especially me. I knew why I couldn't remember his name. I could clearly remember meeting with him on several occasions, some of them even traumatic, like when Tony was a witness for the defense at a trial in Houston, Texas. I remember him visiting our offices in San Diego as well.

Why not? Tony Calvano was one of our original crew of Meredith sleaze providers and a first class dependable one at that.

If he hadn't been the odd man out then, today he would be acknowledged as one of the half-dozen greatest erotic writers of all time.

#

Scott Meredith was the first to make Calvano the odd man out. Naturally Henry Morrison and Joe Elder followed suit. It was easy because Calvano wasn't a New Yorker. He wasn't going to drop into the office unannounced expecting praise for his writings. He wasn't going to become one of the office hanger-ons lurking about hoping for some much needed inspiration. There was no way he could ever socialize with the Friday night social club named The Happy Pornographers, better known as the ingroup who wrote most of those black box sizzlers.

In fact, living in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin, to Meredith, was somewhere close to Hell. Out of sight and out of mind. The only thing Meredith could be sure of was that Calvano would deliver a certain number of sellable words each and every month directly into Meredith's cashbox and the most he would have to do in return would be to have Elder write Calvano a flattering letter every few weeks. A literal literary gold mine!

For all practical purposes, Tony Calvano was ignored completely by the New York boys.

#

FLASHFORWARD....

My initiation into big-time legal fireworks began in mid 1960 when our company was indicted for producing pornography. I wasn't a defendant in that case, I was a witness for the prosecution. In *e14* for October 2002 I wrote my memory of my that trial in Houston, Texas as a part of "Beauty and the Beast *Otra Vez*." **LINK**. Included within that piece, was a special sidebar "Laughter at Smut Case Trial Causes Recess," about a book named *Temple of Shame*, by J.X. Williams [LB673, 1965] that is quite amusing.

After the Houston trial ended involving a number of books, some Calvanos, our boss William Hamling made two things of significance happen; one involved Tony Calvano and the other involved Morton Susman, the prosecutor who placed Hamling and Calvano—among others--on trial together in Houston.

First, Hamling was so pissed off at Morton Susman he ordered that every whore, low-life and scum character in all our books be renamed Susman immediately. It was a great deal of extra work in those pre-PC days. There was no such thing as Find and Replace, no search engines...just people power. Nevertheless, for many months the newsstands and bookstores all over the US were flooded with many hundreds of thousands of copies of books all dealing somehow with that terribly sinful family the Susmans.

Second, Hamling was so impressed by Tony Calvano's (and his wife's Fern's) appearance and actions on the witness stand that he placed him in a special category. Hamling decreed a total hands-off policy for Tony Calvano and placed him in a permanent position of awaiting his next trial appearance. Everything about him was frozen in that moment.

The editorial department--and me--were specifically forbidden to communicate with him regarding any matter and, if pressed, we were to be nice, comforting, and volunteer absolutely nothing to Calvano.

And I am deliberately using the name Calvano here because it was the only name that stuck in my memory.

What Hamling did to Calvano was a very negative thing. What he caused me and the rest of the staff to do to him was insane if not criminal.

Together, all of us succeeded in making Tony Calvano completely the odd man out.

#



Thomas P. Ramirez in Mexico City, January 2005.

Most of the regular writers who worked with Greenleaf Classics, over time, received a great deal of input from the editors who worked with them. It was a matter of routine. There were even some things that we did periodically, especially like passing along the latest legal updates directly from our attorney, Stanley Fleishman.

We also gave those writers writing lessons, especially when they needed it. Especially if they wrote at such a fast pace they expected their readers to comprehend sentences without pronouns or conjunctions. They would be taken to task until the offending practices disappeared from their manuscripts.

We routinely issued things like Peter Cooper's *Greenleaf Classics, Inc. Manual of Style* [see *e112*, February 2004] and mailed copies of it to all the regular writers.

Tony Calvano didn't receive any of them, and he really needed

them.

The edict of hands-off for Calvano became something like a heavy cross to drag around, month after month, year after year. Calvano not only needed compliments and direction, he kept asking for them, and received nothing but faint, non-specific praise in return.

As the years passed, many of them, the formula, the entire approach to writing the books, had changed numbers of times, and all of those evolutionary steps bypassed Calvano. It finally reached a point in the office of near mutiny on the part of some of the editors, who had to do so very much work on Calvano manuscripts to try to bring them into the current framework. None of them wanted to work a Calvano manuscript and all of them wanted to work Clyde Allison manuscripts.

These are many of the reasons why I forgot Tony Calvano's real name. I had to suppress so much about him, for so many years, that the burden overflowed and the easiest out was to erase him from my memory.

I would spend years trying to remember that name. I asked everyone who ever worked on any of the books if they knew, only even the very few that actually knew his name from the old Scott Meredith Literary Agency days were either dead or stone silent. Most of them actually never even knew who he was.

#

After I had been posting my memoirs through my ezine at efanzines.com for a few years, more and more people associated with the sleazebook field in the past began surfacing on the Internet. At times it was like old home week when a new person would turn up.

And finally it happened, the one I had been waiting and hoping for, the forgotten one, the odd man out, came along with a simple little one-line email question: "Do you remember me? I used to write for you as Tony Calvano."

Tomasito.... Home at last, the only significant hold-out, the ignored and neglected prodigal son, Thomas P. Ramirez.

And it all came resoundingly back into my memory. The name was the key...the name I had more or less deliberately forgotten, the name I had tried to wash out of my memory and my past, now the most welcome of all.

The last of the red hot papas was finally home....

#

In Tom Ramirez' memoir "Into the Abyss," elsewhere in this issue of *eI*, he touches upon at least two issues that caused him some puzzlement that I would like to try to illuminate.

One was regarding a manuscript Ramirez wrote for an individual in Switzerland. Tom was concerned that he had never received a copy of that book and had rejected some offer to write more for the gentleman.

While I never knew his name, nor had any contact with him, I do know a number of writers who did. Like Ramirez, he approached them out of the blue with his request for specific material in specific word lengths for which he would pay some nice rates.

The writers who did what he asked all reported prompt, full payment as promised.

What Ramirez never knew was that the gentleman in Switzerland who was buying all those manuscripts was doing just that, buying manuscripts. He was not a publisher but an extremely wealthy private collector. Had Ramirez been so inclined at the time, he could have become that man's resident pornographer and one of the richest men in the entire country.

The second thing that caused Ramirez permanent damage was his visit to the offices of Greenleaf Classics, Inc. on July 31, 1967 and the rude way he felt he was treated on that occasion.

I was there. I remember the occasion, but not many of the details and every one of the details could have been terribly important in determining the way the encounter played out. I don't even know what day of the week it was, or what was hanging in the balance that was terribly pressing at just that moment. Just returned from somewhere? Just leaving for somewhere else? Leaving early for the weekend...?

Reading between the lines in Ramirez' "Into the Abyss," I gather that he was on a vacation visiting Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico and just sort of dropped by the office in San Diego at the same time. I assume further that it was a cold call; that he just walked into the office without letting any of us know he was coming.

I also gather, from the short shrift he received from Hamling, that something pretty pressing was going on for him as well. So much so that Ramirez didn't even get invited into Bill's lavish showroom office. That means to me that some meeting was ongoing in the office at the time with other people present and it would have been very inconvenient to interrupt or delay the process.

And Hamling told me to "take care of them" until he could free up some time.

I remember that I was stuck with Tom for hours while Bill tried to reshuffle his schedule enough to at least take Tom and Fern Ramirez out to lunch at The King's Inn, his most favorite of all Mission Valley restaurants. And, because I was forbidden to communicate with Ramirez, I couldn't say anything. There was nothing to say. It is also apparent that the timing was somehow extremely inconvenient for me as well, causing me to do quite a bit of abrupt rescheduling.

My memory tells me that during that day and while I spent that enforced time with Ramirez, I blew it.

I clearly remember telling him off. I told him that Bill had forbidden any communication with him and that things had changed so very much during that time period that it was a huge problem for me and the whole department. I told him that while his price per manuscript had been frozen at a high level, the market price had fallen considerably. I told him that for every manuscript I had to use of his that was terribly off formula, I could buy THREE that were letter perfect.

I definitely ruined Thomas Ramirez' day...his decade...the rest of his life.

Tom professes to not remember that part too clearly. He professes to still be confused and to not understand much of it even after parts have been explained.

That's the pity of life. It hardly makes sense and one foolish, ill-considered, egomaniacal edict can poison things for many people forever....

- - -

*For Thomas P. Ramirez, Tony Calvano, and a few others; I'm sorry, guys—he made me do it.

Just because some of us can read and write and do a little math, that doesn't mean we deserve to conquer the Universe.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, last line of *Hocus Pocus*

The Meaning of Sleaze

By Brittany A. Daley

Many of you who read this fanzine use the term "sleaze" to refer to a specific genre of books and know exactly what you mean when you use the term (as Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said about pornography, "I know it when I see it"). It has been brought to my attention, though, that the meaning of the term is in need of clarification, particularly to those who aren't as familiar with this genre of books and what they have come to mean to those who collect and research them. Recently, I have been contemplating the meaning of the term "sleaze," what it means to myself and others interested in the genre, and the nature of art in general. I realize that many who read this fanzine may not need clarification about the term's meaning, but I feel it would be beneficial for those out there "lurking" on the Internet, who might not understand what we mean when we use "sleaze," and for a few individuals who don't understand what the products of their so-called "shady pasts" have come to mean to a new audience some 40+ years later.



Brittany Daley is shown in this photograph surrounded by some of her sleazebooks.



Transvestite, by Harry Guggenheim (Nite Time Books 111, 1964).
Cover art by E.M.

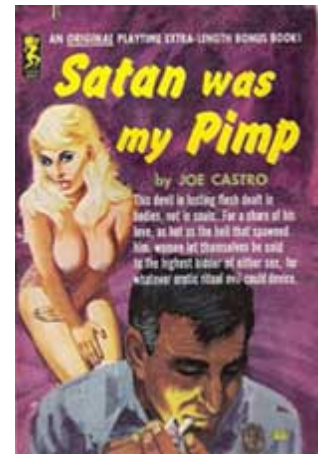
So, what is sleaze, and what does it mean when referring to this genre of books? Generally, "sleaze" is a term that refers to the often inexpensively produced, mass-market paperbacks of the 1960s that catered to an "adults only" audience consisting primarily of men. Swappers, swingers, transvestites, hookers, dominatrixes, and lesbians were just a few of the taboo topics these naughty 1960s novels had the guts to explore. I look at these colorful "smut" gems as artifacts of a by-gone era where sex was sexier than it is today--an era where it was still fresh and daring and not at the center of some over-played national news story. I call these slightly kinky, sorta kooky books "sleaze," because that's what everyone else refers to them as, and I don't have any objections to the term that would make me call them anything else. The term used for this genre of books has changed over the years, though. As Earl wrote in an email to me: "I've lived through dozens of name changes for the same product, dirty books, smut, adult books, erotica, etc. They all have no meaning and, every few years, a new label becomes popular." Meanings are always in flux and what the average person feels the word "sleaze" means is very different from what people interested in the genre feel it means. The average person's idea of "sleaze" might consist of the president getting it on with an intern and a cigar.

One dictionary meaning of the term "sleaze" is the following: "lacking in firmness of texture; poorly made; cheap; shoddy and run down." The production quality of some sleaze publishers' books would fit this meaning but not all were poorly produced. Another dictionary meaning is the following: "not socially acceptable, especially relating to moral or sexual matters." This meaning does fit this genre of books quite well, in regards to both the cover art and the text. Sleaze paperbacks were definitely not socially or morally acceptable to Jane and John Doe when they were first produced (to some ultra-conservative people they still wouldn't be), although John Doe likely hid them under his mattress. Nor were they acceptable to Anthony Comstock worshipping politicians who tried to censor the sleaze publishers and then meanwhile hid their mistresses in their closets. Sleaze books were treated as bona-fide "porn" in their day.

So, would sleaze be considered "porn" today? Of course not. The definition of the term "pornography" has drastically changed over the past century and during any given era it was subjective as hell anyway. What was considered shocking to the average citizen in the early 20th Century? A woman's ankle. What was considered shocking to the average citizen in the 1940s? A two-piece bathing suit. And to the Iowa farmer's wives convicting Milton Luros' sleaze empire back in the mid-'60s, the books he was publishing were pure filth. But compared to paperback books like *Boarding School Whore* and *My Sucking Secretary*, published in the 1970s, the 1960s era sleaze books would barely be enough to make grandma blush. The sleaze paperbacks were filled

with euphemisms like “melons” or “globes” instead of breasts and “fireworks” instead of climaxes or orgasms. In reality, the romance novels my grandma reads today are much more lurid than any sleaze book I’ve ever paged through. And when those same 1970s paperbacks, which usually featured cover drawings, are compared to the graphic photographs on the covers of today’s adult paperbacks, they seem almost quaint.

The point is that what is considered reprehensible by the average citizen in one decade is considered worthy of celebration and research to the average citizen one, two, three decades later. This is definitely the case with sleaze paperbacks, but many other examples come to mind. In the ‘70s, Ed Wood died poor and without recognition, but today he is a cult hero with his own 1994 Tim Burton biopic. Humans are flaky creatures with constantly changing ideas of just about everything. Despite its recognition now as a classic work of literature, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* was censored for over 25 years before it finally got U.S. publication.



Satan Was My Pimp , by Joe Castro [Playtime Books 660, 1964]. Cover art by Robert Bonfils.



Swap, Scrap & Orgy , by J.X. Williams [Nightstand 1761, 1965]. Cover art by Darrel Millsap.

Even the idea of what makes something art is constantly changing and full of subjective, hierarchal distinctions (i.e. highbrow, lowbrow, commercial art, illustration, fine art). While some individuals may look down at pin-up art as “commercial” and “only illustration,” others will dedicate an entire book to the genre and include a defense of it as an art form (see Charles G. Martignette and Louis K. Meisel's *The Great American Pin-Up*). People will also argue about terms themselves. Currently, artists within the lowbrow art movement argue about the term “lowbrow” being used to describe their art. Some feel the movement cannot be labeled at all, while some embrace the term and others prefer the term “pop surrealism.”

Before I end this, I'd like to point out one last important fact about sleaze paperback history. Most people aren't aware of the importance of sleaze paperbacks within the evolution of popular mores. Movies like *Behind the Green Door* and *Deep Throat* are so often cited as opening things up for freer expression. While I believe these films had an important role in their own right, I think they get too much credit. We did not make a direct leap from the 1950s slightly lurid pulp fiction mysteries to the explicit sex shown in those early 1970s adult movies. The sleaze paperback industry was at the forefront of an important period of transition in the 1960s. This period was filled with court battles, with Earl Kemp being involved in his fair share, particularly the battle

over *The Illustrated Presidential Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. Individuals fought hard for the freedom to sell sex, they were victorious (although some, like Earl, had to pay a price), and the floodgates opened for green doors and deep throats. A final thought: what is "sleaze" to some is a great achievement, artistically and socially, to others.

Time is liquid. One moment is no more important than any other and all moments quickly run away.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Bluebeard*

Curious Couplings 3

By Earl Kemp

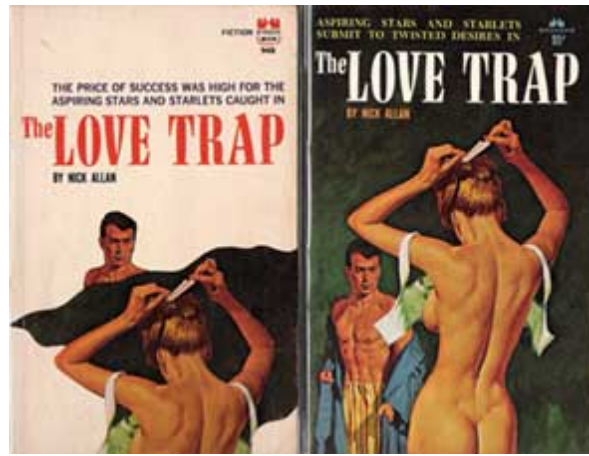
As I wrote in *eI19*, I have noticed a number of odd coincidences regarding sleaze paperback covers and other publications that have intrigued me. Some of them were reasonable and understandable, some of them were outright criminal theft, and some of them were beneath contempt.

What I propose to do is to run a few of them in some issues of *eI* to see if I can create real interest in perusing the venture. It is a participation project. You send me jpegs of your favorite duos to earlkemp@citlink.net and I'll take it from there.

This is the third installment of this projected new reader participation series.

Here then is the third set of examples of Curious Couplings. All of these examples are from the collection of Brittany A. Daley.





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We welcome your contributions to this series. Please email your jpegs to earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you very much for participating in this novel and interesting exercise in futility.

I tell you, we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you any different.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Inc. Technology* No. 4, 1995
